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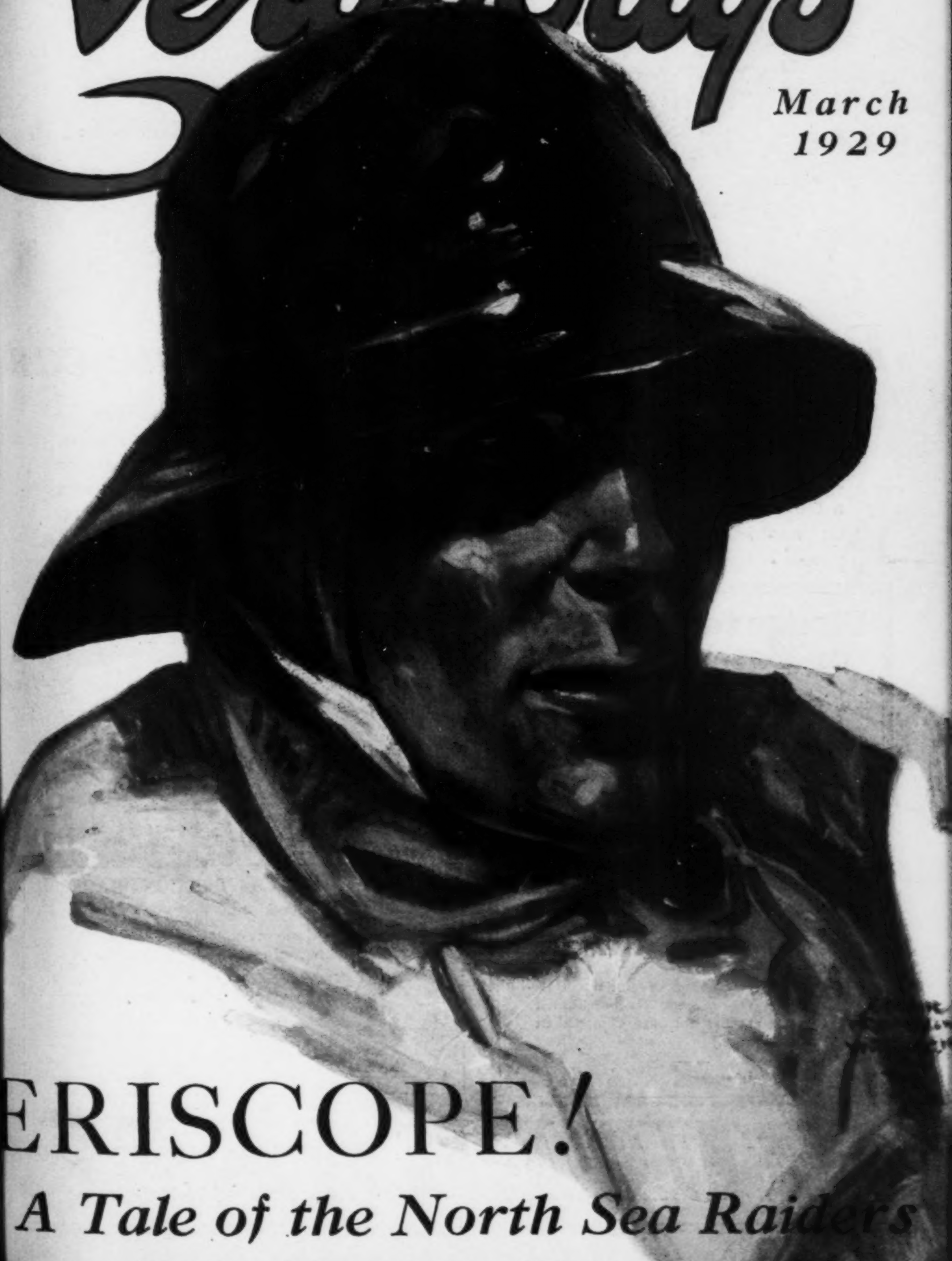

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A Tale of the North Sea Raiders

By L. Murney Mintzer

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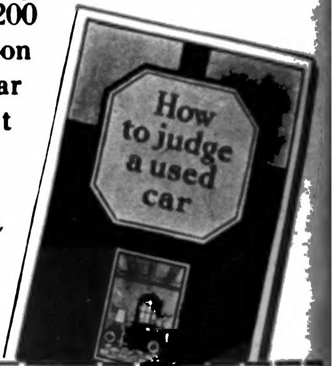

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STUDEBAKER

The Great Independent

March, 1929
Vol. LX No. 3

Everybody's

WILLIAM CORCORAN
Editor

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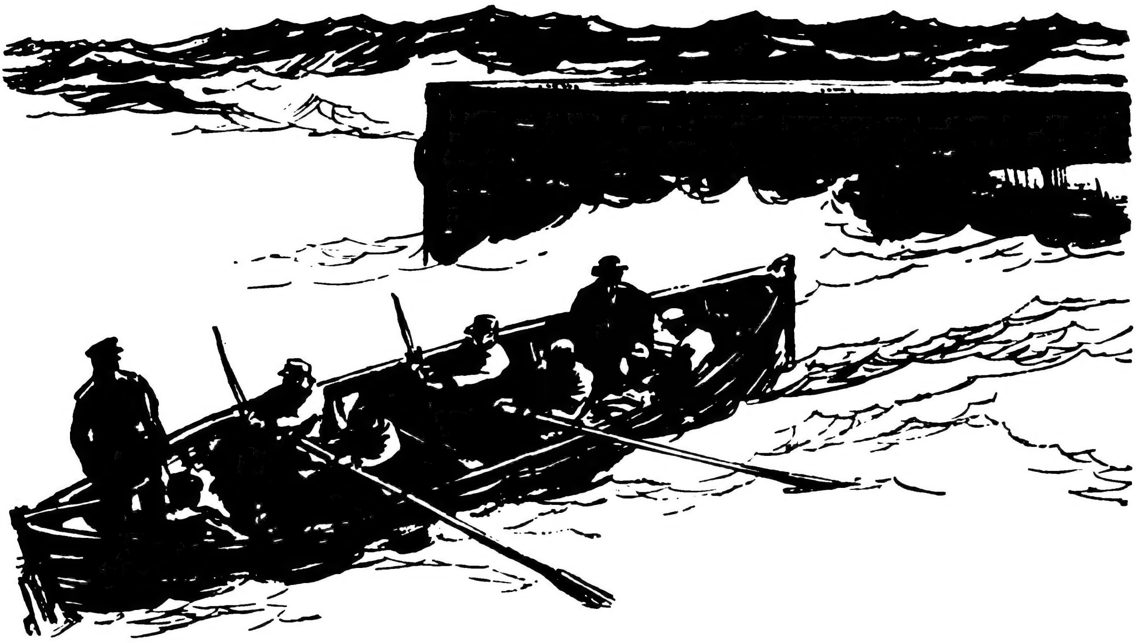
PERISCOPE!

By L. MURNEY MINTZER



CHAPTER I

TORPEDO!

A RHYTHMIC tremor flowed through the *Colima's* old hull, vague and slightly pleasant, more like the slow breathing of deep sleep than the vibration of machinery. The dull tramp of the engine, a half audible echo in the overpowering drowsiness of the night, seemed less substantial than the murmur of water alongside. The brilliant sky, and the soft breeze humming through the shrouds overhead, created an illusion of almost tropical lethargy that was emphasized by the monotonous, unhurried beat of the screw.

The veteran ship of the United Fruit Line fitted smoothly into the illusion. Charlie Needham, the young lieutenant in charge of her armed guard, amused himself by viewing the scene as a projection of some forgotten incident out of her long career in the tropics. He could almost smell the sweet, heavy odor of the jungle, see the wet sheen of palm fringed beaches. Behind him, as he lounged there in the darkness, the bridge was settling down for a quiet midwatch. Near the silent helmsman, the mate, humming softly to himself, leaned comfortably against a stanchion, oblivious to both the danger and the beauty of the night. The sound of talk and subdued laughter drifted up from the deck just below Needham. He frowned slightly as he heard a woman's voice among them.

"Passengers ought to be turned in," he thought as he straightened up and focused his attention rather self-consciously on the quiet sea.

In the light of the rising moon it was a picture of lazy serenity. Long swells slipped in toward the bows; and, as the ship rose ponderously to meet them, they passed and faded into the soft darkness, crested with thin lines of foam, momentary patches of dull white against the uniform blackness of the water. Needham eyed the slight breaks in the surface, faintly disturbed by the thought that among them the feather of a periscope would be all but invisible.

At the sound of steps clattering up the ladder from the deck below, he looked around expectantly, saw a thicker shadow against the bulk of the stack and heard Lentz, his chief gunner's mate, address

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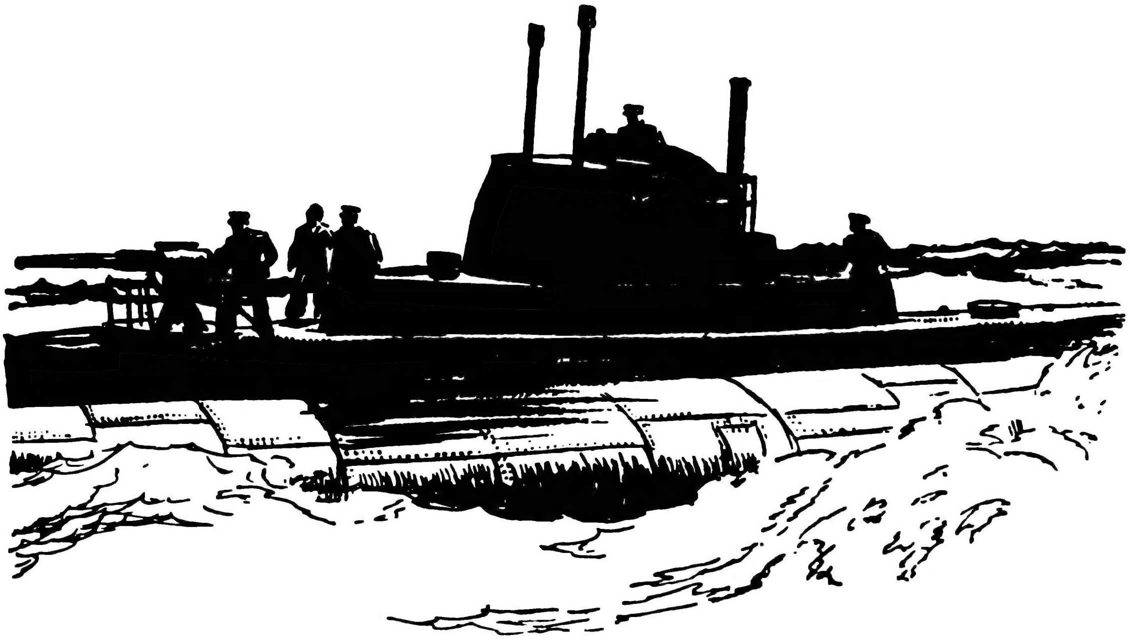


A Complete Novelette of a Raiding U-Boat Which Bore Embattled American Prisoners and a Desperate German Crew Through the North Sea Submarine Barrage on the Most Amazing Voyage of the War

some laughing remark to the mate. In a moment the little, grayhaired petty officer came over to where he stood.

"Gun watches shifted, sir, an' lookouts at their stations." Lentz uttered the report with the perfunctory ease of long habit. "Coffee's comin' right up."

"Why haven't you turned in?" the officer asked as the older man spurted a stream of tobacco juice into the dark void beyond the rail and settled comfortably back against the pelorus stand.

"Thought I'd wait until them passengers gets to bed, sir." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder toward the boat deck where a few dark figures still moved about. "Only last night I caught one of them women there on the boat deck with a flashlight!" His voice rose with righteous indignation. "Huntin' her dog, she sez. She was that skinny old one with all the brightwork strung about her neck. A *flashlight!* No, sir, I don't trust them female passengers —or the men, either. Ain't got no more sense than a bunch o' frog marines."

Needham chuckled, but he still looked inquiringly at the other. Although like Lentz he was too new to the ways of the merchant service to approve of the presence of women aboard ship, he waited for further explanation, wondering if the chief shared his concern for the ship. Both were gazing out into the shadows that had not yet begun to retreat before the moonlight. Ahead, toward the eastern horizon, vague dark spots were just visible. An occasional streak of white under them betrayed where a propeller cut across the top of a swell. As he made out the other ships, Lentz grunted angrily and leaned over the rail to watch the water alongside.

"Ten knots," he announced as he straightened up. "An' us three thousand yards back of the convoy now! I doubled up on the lookouts, sir, an' the after gun's crew is sleepin' on deck."

Needham nodded approval and they fell silent again, mechanically resuming their scrutiny of the unchanging scene before them. Each was worried more than he cared to admit. They knew by this time that the *Colima's* captain concealed an unseamanlike fear of steaming in formation behind the typically crusty, self-assured bearing of a Down East sailor. In spite of his own rather nebulous authority on board, Needham had twice warned the captain that he was courting disaster by lagging behind the convoy. The naval officer could grin now in the darkness at his own resentment at the trivial nature of the excuses that he had been given; the kind that might have been offered to a landsman. Tonight, he knew, the chief engineer had been given permission to clean fires; the ship would close up sometime before daylight. Needham dismissed the subject with the grim thought that, if the U-boat people lived up to their reputation, the American merchant service would soon overcome its aversion for the convoy system.

AS THE moonlight grew brighter the occasional ruffles of foam on the water became more conspicuous. The two men relaxed comfortably but their eyes probed the darkness restlessly. Needham's mind drifted back over the past few weeks. The ship had been at sea for ten days now. Back of that period lay weeks of planning and scheming to achieve something like an active part in the War. It was his first trip with the armed guard and he fervently hoped it would be his last. The duty was better, of course, than the job he had left; but both he and Lentz looked upon it as a temporary assignment, a first step toward real work in the war zone on a man-of-war.

When the War started he had been in command of a submarine in the Caribbean. It was an old boat, too old for anything else, condemned to the endless monotony of experimental work for the benefit of newer, more fortunate submarines that were hunting their own kind in the Channel and the North Sea. Like all the others down there he had tried time after time to get away. Some had gone, leaving the others more restless than ever. At last he had seen his chance in the growing demand for more officers to command gun crews on merchant ships.

At first it had merely promised to get him a little nearer to the War. Then a letter from an old shipmate had given him the tip that, once in a European port, his submarine experience might win him a chance in the underwater force again. Unhesitatingly he had applied for a transfer and pinned his hopes upon the promise of an old commanding officer in London to try and find him a job on the other side. Because experienced men were badly needed in the armed guard work, and because Lentz had served with him for the better part of two cruises, Needham had managed to take the old chief along.

Now, as the time of their arrival grew near, he felt hope slipping away from him, saw the coveted submarine duty as far away as ever. But he grinned at his own discouragement. Time enough to cross that bridge when he came to it. If not this trip, then the next. Of his ultimate success he had no doubt. Sooner or later he would get that war zone submarine.

Abruptly he straightened up and fixed his eyes upon a spot just forward of the beam where he had sensed rather than seen a momentary break in the level monotony of the sea. Twice in quick succession he caught a gleam of white, tantalizingly like a hundred others, yet somehow different.

"Can you make anything out?" he asked Lentz, pointing. "There, one point for'rd of the beam."

Lentz was already alert. He watched intently for a full minute.

"Might be. I thought I spotted something," he said hesitantly. "If it is a sub, it's overhauling us. Twelve or thirteen knots—submerged!"

There was a queer inflection of envy in Lentz's voice. The old Caribbean boats had made ten knots—sometimes. Seeing nothing further they fell silent again.

The chief's tone found a ready echo in Needham's mind. To both, the night seemed to be more of an opportunity than a danger. Beneath their preoccupation with the job at hand—the matter of getting the *Colima* safely through the submarine zone—both were still submarine men themselves, utterly unable to drown out their instinctive loyalty to the type of craft in which lay all their interests, viewing the situation as if they saw it through a periscope.

Because they had lived for years with the thought of war, and had hobnobbed with men of all navies, their feeling toward the present enemy was quite unclouded by any personal animosity. Throughout the War they had watched the progress of the submarine campaign; at first had even applauded feats like the sinking of the *Aboukir* and her two sister armored cruisers. Knowing the obstacles that the enemy had surmounted and the risks that he ran, they looked upon him as a daring and not necessarily unworthy antagonist; able, perhaps sometimes brutal, but neither a hero nor a fiend. As for lurid propaganda on U-boat atrocities, they read it with avidity, as sensational but decidedly unreal and bungling fiction.

DURING the short pause, while they strove to identify the particular disturbance of the water that had caught Needham's attention, the voices of the passengers below were suddenly stilled.

"It was moving against the sea." The girl's voice again, unexcited, assured, broke the silence. "Over there where I am pointing."

"Hear that, sir? That's the little one with the grin." Lentz spoke without taking his eyes from the water. "She has sense, that one has."

". . . Course not," the voice went on in reply to an inaudible question. "He and that nice old gunner are both up there telling each other how women are losing the War."

Needham was thankful for the darkness that hid the color rising in his cheeks. He knew the voice. His cheeks burned as he recalled a scene at dinner two or three days before. He had just been tracing down stray lights on deck, patiently explaining to round eyed passengers that there really were submarines at large. There at the dinner table his impatience had betrayed him into an unguarded outburst against all women who looked upon war as an unwarranted interference with their personal convenience. Angered by the knowledge that he had made a fool of himself, he had squirmed under a chorus of sympathy led by a flabby chinned ex-clothing buyer who was only slightly disguised in the uniform of a major in the Quartermaster Corps.

This girl, Alice Langley, had maintained a demure silence, but he had caught a suspicious looking glint of amusement in her eyes that had made him feel like a pricked balloon. The knowledge that she herself was quite the opposite of the type that he had been attacking had intensified his discomfiture. For the moment, he knew that she thought him quite as funny as the fussy ladies who wear life-jackets in bed even while they leave open the air-ports of their lighted rooms.

Later, during the same evening, a steward had handed him some trivial message, an order to prepare three extra copies of the ration record or some other such empty formality. Whatever it had been, the highly sentimental lady who sat next to him had stopped in the middle of a sentence and a respectful hush had fallen over the room while most of them had watched him breathlessly as if he held a secret dispatch from Admiral Sims himself. Swearing inwardly, he had tried to appear unconscious of their attention when Alice Langley had caught his eye again. The same suspicion of hidden amusement lurked in her eyes as she spoke up innocently.

"It must be fascinating to live in the midst of all these official mysteries."

He had retired hastily with as much dignity as he could muster. It was not that he wanted them to take him seriously, he told himself now as he listened for her voice again, but that she always managed to make it appear that he was impressed by the inane flattery of the passengers.

The ship swung along with her slow, easy roll. As the moonlight increased, the others ahead seemed nearer, their vague silhouettes lifting out of the water and growing sharper. The thin moon traced a constantly shifting beam of light across the waves. Above, the stars dimmed rapidly as the sky lost its hard blue. Although he was not at all sleepy, a pleasant drowsiness crept over Needham as his senses relaxed in the universal serenity of the night. Alongside, the water hissed softly as it curled out from the bow and sighed in the mouths of the overboard drains; slight, inconsequential sounds that accentuated the general stillness.

FOR an hour or more the silence continued. With mechanical regularity Lentz leaned toward the rail and expertly ejected his accumulation of tobacco juice. Once an ash hoist clattered somewhere aft and two or three firemen moved lazily between the deckhouse and the rail. Everything else in the ship seemed to be asleep. To occupy his mind Needham imagined himself on a submarine trying to bag a ship from the convoy. It would be the *Colima*, the easiest prey, plodding along in the wake of the others, far out of reach of the accompanying cruiser. At her speed it would be easy to come up from astern.

The starboard bow would be best. Come in to six or seven hundred yards and let her have it. Wouldn't need to show your periscope more than a few seconds at a time. It would be almost too easy. Best to hit her about amidships. One torpedo there would put her down in ten or fifteen minutes, before she got a chance to do much with her guns. The rest of the convoy would clear out. The ship probably wouldn't see the submarine at all, at least not until the torpedo arrived. A well handled periscope, on a night like this, would make a feather just like the crest of a sea, a momentary flutter of innocent looking white foam. Afterward only a wild scramble around the boats, two or three unaimed rounds from the guns, and down she would go!

What could the ship do? Not much if the torpedo ran true. She would take a big list right away, enough so that the guns probably wouldn't be able to bear. Needham's interest quickened as he tried to devise a way to strike back at the submarine. Have to get the passengers clear, of course. In weather like this they would be well enough off in the boats for the few hours that they would have to wait to be picked up.

Not much chance at the submarine, though, he concluded. If the torpedo ran a little off, struck well aft or well forward, the ship would be longer in going down, probably wouldn't take such a big list. And the submarine might not want to use another torpedo. They'd be apt to come up at two or three thousand yards and use their gun—broad on the bow probably, where the after gun couldn't reach them. Might be time for two or three rounds from Number One. The sub would shoot at that gun, of course; if she was near enough to make it out. Try to put it out of commission. One gun—at long range and under fire—would be badly handicapped.

At last Lentz straightened up and turned to go.

"I'll have a look down on the fo'c's'le, sir," he muttered as he moved away.

HE WAS hardly down the ladder when Needham, whose eyes had rarely left the sea, had an impulse to call him back. Twice in quick succession he thought he saw slight breaks in the surface. Then, as he strained his eyes to see what it was, he heard Alice Langley's voice again.

"Mister Lentz?"

"Yes, ma'am," Lentz responded with alacrity.

"Are there any whales in these waters? I just saw . . . ."

Abruptly Needham lost interest in the voices below. A patch of wet metal gleamed on the side of a sea, broad on the starboard bow.

"Port helm!" he shouted to the mate.

The sleeping men on the forecastle boiled into activity. Lookouts sprang to the gun. The mate flung himself at the wheel. Then, as Needham's eyes strained into the darkness, a vast, soft concussion hurled the ship far over on her port side. Men whirled and scrambled while the air exploded against their eardrums. Far up above the side a fountain of water hung poised, gleaming white in the moonlight. Needham picked himself up from the deck. He was astonished to hear the beat of the engine going on undisturbed. A suspicion that he was dreaming flitted through his mind. But when he had regained his feet, he could feel the ship losing way, settling over to starboard, her motion suddenly tired.

"Train, four two!" He shouted almost before his mind had grasped the extent of the calamity that had fallen upon them.

"Hit just for'rd of the bridge, sir," Lentz called without excitement.

Needham looked down and saw the white oval of the chief's face against the yellow background of the deck.

"She'll go slow——"

The blast of the forecastle gun flared out in a sheet of dazzling flame. The concussion of the recoil racked the ship and a stunning convulsion of noise pounded on their eardrums. Following their orders, the pointers were firing blindly to keep the submarine down.

As his vision cleared, Needham saw a boiling spot against the dark water. Although it was four or five thousand yards away he saw the light glisten on the metal again.

"Train, five five! Range, four six double O."

The splash of the *Colima's* first shell was subsiding into a white mound halfway between the ship and the submarine. The gun let go again, another spout of gleaming water shot up beyond the target. It was closing in quite undisturbed by the ranging shots of the merchant ship. Needham thought of the passengers.

"Cease firing!" he called into a voice tube. An instant later a shell plunged into the water alongside, steel whined overhead as water from the splash cascaded down on the boat deck abaft of the bridge. As he turned, he saw white figures crowding about the lifeboats, women's voices calling hysterically. Although it seemed that only a moment had passed since the torpedo struck, boats were already dropping away from the davits. He waited impatiently to see whether the enemy, too, would suspend firing until the boats were clear. He could see her clearly now. She was farther away than he had thought at first and was still drawing toward the *Colima's* bow. But her gun was silent.

"Man the boats! Man the boats!" Captain Gill was down on the boat deck shouting at the passengers. But Needham hardly heard him. He was watching the submarine almost enviously. Clearly, whoever was handling her knew his business.

"Headed away as soon as he let go his torpedo," Needham thought. "Must have fired at about a thousand yards. He's in no hurry either."

The captain scrambled up the ladder and looked down at the forecastle.

"Stand clear of that gun."

He waved his arms excitedly at the men. They stood still, looking from him to Needham.

"We'll stay aboard a while, Captain."

The naval officer reluctantly dragged his eyes away from the submarine and looked at Gill. He saw that the man was beyond thinking of anything but the loss of his ship.

"You're drawing their fire." The captain glared at the submarine; then looked back where the passengers were still swarming around the boats. "My passengers must——"

"We won't fire until you're clear—unless they do."

Needham's eyes were back on the submarine. He saw that she was heading away from the ship. Viewed stern on she looked astonishingly small. Evidently she was going to give them a chance to abandon ship. The ship took a sudden roll to port. They all slipped and scrambled down the steep slope, recovering themselves with difficulty as she righted. But the thought flashed through Needham's mind that she was settling very slowly. He prayed that the fireroom bulkhead would continue to hold.

Lentz appeared at the head of the ladder, looked around for Needham and came forward hastily.

"They're going to lay off a ways." He jerked his thumb toward the submarine.

"Opening the range," Needham agreed. "We'll stay aboard and see what we can do after the boats shove off."

It was light enough for him to see a flicker of grim pleasure on the old fellow's face.

The mate and the captain were standing apart, arguing angrily over something. The latter turned abruptly and left the bridge. The mate came over to where Needham and Lentz were staring at the submarine.

"I'll give you a hand with your boat," he said quietly.

"Thanks, but there isn't much to do," Needham assured him. "We have men enough. Just get the boats clear as fast as you can."

The mate turned away and the other men on the bridge followed him with visible reluctance. Aft, the crowd of passengers was thinning rapidly.

"I'll leave a boat rigged out for you," the mate called back over his shoulder. "There are plenty of them."

THE submarine had stopped now and was lying to, watching the boats clear the ship. Needham turned to Lentz and spoke in a calm voice.

"Better go down to the gun and stand by. We won't get off many rounds. Make 'em good."

Lentz touched his cap and hurried away. There was no time to lose. Although the ship was settling slowly her list was increasing. Needham watched the last of the boats fill. One of the ship's officers shouted, waited a moment to make sure that crew and passengers were all clear. He recognized the mate standing by the forward davit, ready to lower away and slide down the falls when the boat was waterborne. The scene was suddenly peaceful again. The ship, her engines at last stilled, rolled gently while the sea slapped against her high sides. Again the feeling that it was all a dream came over Needham. The possibility of shell fire seemed remote, unreal.

The mate gave a signal. The boat bumped heavily against the side, lowered away with the falls groaning under their load. Some distance from the ship the other boats had collected in a confused clump and were crawling away. The mate's boat shoved off and moved slowly after them. Needham watched until it was clear of the ship and then turned to look for the submarine. He picked it up farther aft than it had been before. The ship had fallen off into the trough of the sea. He saw spray fly up from the submarine's bow and saw that it was closing in cautiously, probably trying to make out whether anyone was left on board.

"Lie down on deck!" he called to the men on the forecastle, taking care to keep below the level of the canvas weather cloth. He turned toward the voice tube to the after gun.

With a splitting crash a fountain of flame sprayed up from the superstructure aft, followed instantly by the sharp roar of the submarine's gun. She was wasting no time in getting down to business.

"Jones!" In the silence that followed the explosion of the shell Needham's voice seemed startlingly loud. "Have the men lie down until I give the word."

"We don't bear, sir," the voice came back over the tube. Needham identified a vague rustling sound as the murmur of flames where the shell had ignited the woodwork of the deckhouse.

"I know. But I don't want them to see that we are aboard. When I give the word, open up whether you bear or not."

"Aye, aye, sir."

A lump rose in the officer's throat at the cheery acknowledgment. But the ruse might divide the submarine's fire, give the forward crew a chance if the submarine would come close enough.

He turned quickly to look at the enemy again. But he was taking no chances. The craft had stopped. Needham could see men grouped about the gun. A lone figure appeared against the sky line on the conning tower. As he looked the gun spurted flame again and another shell shrieked into the water alongside. The submarine was still cautious.

"Stand by!" Needham called to the forecastle gun. Then through the voice tube to the after gun. "Range, three 0 double O. Commence firing!"

Another shell crashed into the *Colima* as the after gun let go. Flames roared up now, spreading a glare over the whole superstructure.

"Commence firing one!" Needham called.

Instantly the gun jerked back spraying brilliant orange flame from its muzzle. He suddenly noticed that he could scarcely see the submarine. The glare of the fire aft made it impossible to see more than three or four points from the bow. The pointers must be blinded. If the submarine could be made to move up toward the bow . . . He ran to the side and peered down, then back, to look at the compass and saw that the bow was slowly falling off to starboard. There was a chance. If the bow gun remained unhit for five minutes more the target might be visible again.

Another crash filled the air with droning splinters. Looking back he saw that the shell had hit the lifeboat hanging ready at the davit heads just aft of the bridge. The enemy was trying for the forward gun then.

"Cease firing one!" he shouted into the voice tube.

Straining his eyes to see the submarine, he could make out nothing more than a vague blur. The fire of the after gun seemed to double in intensity as the other stopped. A splash glistened in the light of the fire, five hundred yards to the right and far beyond what appeared to be the submarine.

"Two five double O," he called through the voice tube. "Left two."

The next shell struck aft. The ruse was working.

THERE was a violent upheaval under Needham's feet. He staggered, fell and brought up against a stanchion, half dazed, his eyes on a flickering little flame that licked about the weather cloth, then was absorbed in a great sheet of fire that roared up from below. Before he could get to his feet, another crash aft sent wood flying high in the air. The ship quivered, was enveloped in a vast bellowing noise that he dimly realized was steam from the boilers.

Smoke swirled about him. He found himself on his feet, fumbling for the rail, strangely weak. It was gone and between him and the forecastle an impenetrable wall of fire was reared. Turning to feel his way toward the ladder, he caught a brief glimpse of the submarine. It was bearing away from the burning ship, withdrawing to a safer range, but clearly visible again. Far beyond, a shell splash was just subsiding. He saw another off to the right, before the smoke closed in again.

He could not seem to find the bridge ladder. Feeling for it, he lost his balance and plunged down ten feet to the deck below. He struck in a tangle of wreckage that was filled with fire. Sharp pain stabbed his knee as he struggled to haul himself forward away from the heat. Through a rift in the smoke he saw Lentz staring anxiously up at the bridge. He tried to shout and his voice seemed to be a mere whisper in the roar of steam and fire. He must get forward and tell them to open fire.

He clawed at the burning wreckage that hemmed him in, conscious of suffocating heat. And then, without knowing just how he had got there, he found himself on the forecastle. Looking over the side he could just make out the submarine, much nearer the bow than it had been before. He realized that the ship was still swinging, that the target was in the sector of clearer visibility.

Lentz shouted in his ear.

"She's getting where we can see her. But it's a long shot."

Looking back at the fire that was consuming the ship, it seemed to Needham that she could not possibly last five minutes longer. The after gun was still firing, at longer intervals now. The submarine's gun was working furiously.

"Commence firing!" he called to the gun pointers.

His face suddenly seemed to be wet. He put up his hand uncertainly and then blackness closed in around him.

When he recovered consciousness he looked up and saw the men of the gun crew leaping around their piece. Empty shell cases rolled about on deck. Needham sat up, saw the sightsetter slump down against the slide. Looking closer, he saw that the man was holding his side with one hand while he tried to set sights with the other. Struggling to his feet, Needham dragged the man away from the gun and took his place. As he looked at the range dial his heart came up in his throat. Thirty-five hundred yards! The man had been out of his head.

"Silence!" Needham called. To his confused senses his voice seemed astonishingly loud. While Lentz waited with the breech plug open, he whirled the disk around to twenty-two hundred wondering if there would be time to make up for the wasted rounds. Shells were striking continuously now. Aft, the ship was almost unrecognizable as the fires fed on her heavily painted old woodwork.

"Carry on!" Needham called as soon as the sights were corrected.

The gun slammed back and an instant later they saw the splash jerk up just beyond the submarine.

"Rapid fire!"

Another shell clanged home and the gun let go without a pause.

"Closer now, sir," Lentz yelled as he whirled his plug open. But the ship lurched, wavered, and her bow plunged heavily into a sea.

"There goes the bulkhead," Needham thought. As he straightened to see the next splash he saw a boat move into the glare of the fire. Dully he wondered what it was doing there. Blurred white faces swam into view, hands waved, beckoned. He realized that one of them was Alice Langley's. He suppressed an impulse to go to the rail and order her away. A queer buzzing in his head seemed to dull his pain. Things grew hazy but he clung to a fading memory that there was still something to be done.

"That was it—one more shell." The thought cleared his mind slightly.

THE ship lurched again, lower this time. Fire sprayed up out of the deck all about them. A violent shove threw him sprawling away from the gun. A new pain, sharp and bitter like acid, seared his face.

He struggled to his feet once more, saw a stumpy form that was dimly familiar fitting a shell into the gun. The rest of the men had disappeared.

"Must get off that shell," Needham spoke aloud, his head turning uncertainly from side to side. Up the slanting deck he fought his way back to the gun. At the pointer's telescope he was overjoyed to find that the sight lights were still on.

"Train left! Train left!" he directed irritably.

Where was the trainer? Then he remembered, and looking across the gun, he saw Lentz just taking his place at the other wheel.

"Gotcha, sir."

The sight of the old chief carefully reversing his cap was oddly comforting to the officer; one familiar action in a world that had suddenly been distorted beyond recognition. He wondered how Lentz had managed to keep his cap on. His own had long since disappeared. He recalled that there was some reason for haste; what it was he could not remember. Through the sight telescope he saw nothing but water. Then the gun—or the ship, he wasn't sure which—swung slowly and the submarine's low conning tower swam into the round field of the glass. It disappeared instantly, then reappeared and moved slowly toward the intersection of the cross wires.

Abruptly Needham's head cleared again. He realized that he was turning the pointer's wheel madly in the effort to keep the sights on as the ship rolled. She was going down, he knew that now as the hollow boom of bulkheads sounded above the roar of the flames. His thumb trembled above the firing key. In the neat field of the telescope the image of the target swerved erratically, then steadied down, reached the cross wires.

Flame seared across his view. Beside his elbow the gun jerked back like a huge piston. Later, with a stunning conviction of failure, he realized that he had fired.

"Come on, sir, she's going."

Lentz pulled at his shoulder. Underfoot the motion of the ship had altered. Just forward of the gun a sea ripped by where the bow should have been. Overhead a shapeless bulk towered, a stream of sparks poured over the edge of a black hole that must be the top of the funnel. Somehow, the two of them hauled themselves across an almost perpendicular deck, out through the life lines and down into the water. All that Needham could remember afterward was that in some inexplicable way he had found himself crawling across the anchor that seemed to lay flat on the shell plating.

In the water, his hand touched and closed upon a life-jacket. A few feet away an arm splashed out of the water, the fingers clutching at empty air. Weariness clogged his brain and he stared dully. A second later he struck out furiously toward the spot.

"Of course," the thought struck him, "Lentz could not swim!"

Somehow he caught hold of the other's shoulder, tied the strings of the life-jacket under his arms. Battling the pleasant feeling of drowsiness that crept upward from his legs, he clung to Lentz and paddled feebly.

The drowsy, warm sensation was all over him now. He relaxed, welcomed it. Then a face appeared above him, seemed to float mysteriously in the air. From a long way off he heard the slap of water against the side of a boat. He tried to understand the face . . . It was a girl . . . That Langley girl . . . but she . . . .

THE sting of liquor in his throat forced his eyes open. He looked up and saw that the mate was holding him by one shoulder. Other men's faces crowded in. Then his memory returned with a rush. He struggled to rise.

" 'Vast heavin' there, sir." The mate held him down. "Better hold on a bit. You're hit."

Needham stared about. The ship was gone. He recalled that final shot.

"The submarine?" he asked.

"Missed her altogether, I'm afraid," the mate replied.

Needham dropped back on the thwart, suddenly conscious of the pain of his wounds, his face dark with disappointment.

"Now hold still while I have a look at your head."

At the familiar voice he looked around and saw Alice Langley with her hands full of bandages. He wondered where she had found them in the boat. Most boat boxes, he knew, were apt to be disappointing in an emergency.

"Hurts, doesn't it?" Her cheerful tone seemed to challenge his apathy. "That's the salt, I think. This cut is raw, but it isn't deep. Now what's wrong with that leg?"

As he saw that the leg of his trousers was nearly torn off, he recalled the fall from the bridge. Through the tear, blood oozed from a gash where a splinter had ripped across just below the knee.

But remembering the quiet forms that he had seen around the gun on the Colima, he looked anxiously around the boat striving to make out the faces of his men.

"Most of them got off," the girl said, reading his thought. "Lentz is all right—except for the salt water he swallowed. The men on the after gun—didn't suffer—as much as the others did."

He had never heard her voice falter before and he looked up now. She looked away, her voice low as she went on:

"They were such nice boys . . . I just wanted to let you know that I think they—you all—did splendidly."

Surprised and greatly embarrassed by her evident sincerity, he tried to think of something to say.

"Where is the sub?" he managed to ask after a pause. He could guess that it wouldn't be far away, but he seized upon the first pretext that came to mind.

"Wait just a minute until I'm through, and you can look." She bent down and hurriedly bound up his leg. "I think that it is heading this way."

"You feelin' all right, sir?"

It was good to hear Lentz's voice again. He looked around and saw the little chief crawling toward him over the after thwart.

"Fine," he responded as heartily as he could. "How about our people, Lentz? Are you sure none of them are in the water yet?"

"Not much chance, sir. Upshaw, Sanko, Isaacs and young Allen all got it at the for'rd gun. I looked 'em over myself, sir. And Schlossback, the sightsetter, was hit in the ribs by a shell splinter. He went over the side just before we did—out cold. One of the other boats picked up more, both hit, and all but two from the after gun. We got Jones from there in this boat. He ain't touched."

Needham gulped and looked at Lentz silently. It was the first time either of them had been under fire, and they had both been proud of those gun crews. It would have been easier to bear the loss if they had hit the submarine. But at that moment a hail came clearly over the water.

"In the boat, there!"

Needham looked up and saw the submarine bearing down on them.

"Get that blouse off," he whispered hastily to Lentz, at the same time trying to get his own unbuttoned.

"Here, I'll help you," Alice offered with quick understanding. "They try to identify the officer, don't they?"

With her help he quickly got rid of the only part of his uniform that bore any sign of rank. The fireman beside him stripped off his own dungaree jumper and wrapped it around the officer's shoulders.

"In the boat, there!" the voice from the submarine repeated, in English.

"Yes. What d'you want?" the mate answered, after motioning to Needham to keep silent.

"Come alongside."

The officer on the submarine's bridge lowered a small megaphone from his mouth and called something in German to the men on deck. Except for the uniform cap that he wore pushed back on his head, he bore no sign of rank, and his posture, as he leaned easily on the railing, had none of the traditional stiffness of the German officer. As the lifeboat lifted on a sea, Needham saw a thin, good-natured face that seemed strangely white and strained by some hidden effort.

A heaving line shot out from the submarine and fell short. After two or three more attempts it reached the boat and one of the *Colima's* men secured it in the bow.

"Sorry we had to shell you."

The German's tone was regretful but carried no apology. As he leaned over and looked down on them, the strain in his face contrasted strikingly with his careless poise and calm voice.

The boat crashed violently against the bulging side of the submarine. The Germans on deck, heeedless or inexperienced, had hauled in with a will. Several men around Needham were knocked down by the shock and the mate swore feelingly at all Germans while he hastily examined the siding for leaks. The German officer bitterly denounced the men on deck. And, then looking down into the boat again as if he looked for some officer to accept his apology, he smiled deprecatingly.

"Acts like an officer of the deck receiving a boat from a friendly man-o-war," Needham thought as he carefully avoided the German's eyes, afraid that he would betray himself by some unconscious gesture of understanding.

He had already guessed that many of the German sailors were recruits. Even in the moonlight their newness was obvious. They moved about falteringly as if they feared that the slight roll of their craft would pitch them overboard. Their uniforms, too, seemed poorly fitted, worn with the self-conscious stiffness that betrays the new recruit the world over.

WHILE the boat was being secured alongside, the Americans scrutinized their captors curiously. The faces of the men who looked down upon them were not prepossessing. They betrayed an animosity toward their prisoners that seemed strange after the matter-of-fact bearing of their commanding officer. A second officer, who stood a little apart from the men, moved over now and looked down into the boat. His glance traveled carelessly over the men; then he stiffened as his eyes lit upon Alice Langley in the stern. Something like a smile appeared on his face; a smile that was at once appreciative and boldly intimate. The Americans stirred angrily, suddenly conscious that the girl had sacrificed half of her clothes for bandages. The mate hastily picked up a coat from the bottom of the boat and threw it over her bare shoulders.

The German turned and sputtered an angry order at his men who had crowded up behind him to stare at the girl. Lentz and Needham exchanged glances as they noted his carefully waxed mustache and stiff, arrogant bearing. Against the unpretentious background of the submarine, he seemed out of place, artificial. But it was a type with which both of them were familiar.

"Looks like a battleship officer," Lentz whispered, and Needham mentally seconded the indictment. The *unter-leutnant,* like the enlisted men, was too obviously raw to be a seasoned submarine officer. He moved aft now to get a better look at the woman in the boat, mechanically settling his cap straight on his head as he tried to catch her eye, leaning down for the purpose with a condescending smile.

"Von Poleski!" the first officer's voice came from the conning tower, sharp with impatience. The order that followed was unintelligible to the Americans, but they had no difficulty in detecting the disgust in the tone.

Von Poleski's face clouded with anger as his eyes shifted to the men in the boat.

"Get oudt. Come here on board!"

The men looked inquiringly at the mate, and at his nod they scrambled up the low side of the submarine. When all were out but the two badly wounded men and Alice Langley, the Germans who had been handing the others up the side paused and looked inquiringly at their officer. He glanced at her again and barked a sharp order.

"And also you, madam," he called, as two men jumped down to help her out.

Watching her as she came over the side, Needham was astonished to see that her air of suppressed amusement had returned. As her eyes lit upon Von Poleski, she seemed at the point of laughing aloud. Deftly eluding the proffered hand, she stepped over among the Americans. Needham stiffened as he saw the coat that the mate had thrown over her shoulders. It was his own, the two gold stripes glittering conspicuously in the moonlight.

"Look what caught us," she whispered in Needham's ear with a suppressed chuckle. "A seagoing tailor's dummy."

The German first officer was speaking again. Needham caught an inflection of amusement in his voice as he gave directions to his assistant.

Lentz grinned and sidled over.

"Told 'im to leave the wounded in the boat," he translated for Needham's benefit. "An' then he asks this bird if it had occurred to him that the one in the naval officer's blouse might be a woman."

Von Poleski, angered by his superior's ridicule, glowered as he advanced upon the prisoners. With the aid of two or three of his men he lined them up in single file, a wet and bedraggled looking lot. He looked them over until he saw the elaborate tattooing on the mate's bare arms. That, apparently, was what he was looking for. He waved to the men and two of them seized Larsen, hurriedly propelling toward the hatch. Needham started forward but Lentz caught his sleeve.

"Hold up, sir. Here comes the chief. He won't take the mate for no naval officer."

THE first officer had come down from the conning tower. And now he stepped in front of the prisoners. With a gesture, he halted the men who were taking the mate below and, after glancing at the latter's face and scrutinizing his arms and hands, he turned back to the others.

Needham instinctively shrank back conscious of his light shoes and serge uniform trousers. But his confidence returned as he saw that the German was apparently satisfied with a passing glance at him. But Lentz appeared to arouse more interest.

"Step forward," the German directed as he reached the chief petty officer. Lentz briskly obeyed and stood facing the officer.

The latter nodded to himself as if he had demonstrated something to his own satisfaction.

"A petty officer. A chief petty officer, I should judge, yes?"

Startled by the uncanny penetration of the officer, Lentz could find nothing to say.

The German smiled.

"And which is your officer? That gentleman?" He pointed to the mate.

"No, sir," Lentz replied. "They ain't no officer in this boat. He went down, he did—" He paused as he saw the captain's eyes on the blouse. "That coat the lady is wearin', we picked up out of the water," he finished, with an inspiration that surprised even himself.

The German smiled and came over nearer the other prisoners.

"You three other men with wet clothes step forward, please," he directed. Then as Needham and two others obeyed: "Now, hold out your hands."

His voice sounded thick, strained and he wavered on his feet. Puzzled, Needham wondered if the man could be sick; then forgot in his effort to understand the reason for the strange request.

The German's eyes lighted as he looked at Needham's hands. He straightened up and saluted.

"I am Lieutenant Wedel," he said pleasantly.. "And I regret to inform you that you are a prisoner of war."

The German smiled without rancor, and in spite of the tightening in his throat at the discovery, Needham was conscious of sympathy for his captor, inspired by the pain that he saw in the other's face. The evidence of the German's physical weakness was more evident now. He put his hand up to his face uncertainly, then smiled wanly again as he pointed to the Annapolis ring on the American's finger.

"I have seen them many times—under more pleasant circumstances. As a guest in your wardrooms—and a host in our own. You did well tonight, Lieutenant. Almost too—" He stopped abruptly, wavered on his feet and toppled over on deck.

In the stir that followed the collapse of the officer, Needham was thrust over beside the open hatch where the mate was still being held. As the officer was being carried below, a lookout on the conning tower hailed excitedly and pointed toward the eastern horizon. Von Poleski shouted orders and the Germans bundled the remaining Americans unceremoniously into their boat.

"You and you." Needham looked around at Von Poleski and saw him pointing out Lentz and young Jones, the sight-setter from the after gun. Some of the Germans who were already going below, shouldered Needham aside. Stepping backward, he felt the deck give under his foot. He looked around and saw that a stretch of plating was gashed and bent as if it had been ripped open by a huge can opener. From right against the conning tower on the port side to within a foot or so of the gun, the deck had been completely torn up. He forgot his own situation, forgot the certainty of a prison camp ahead of him in a rush of triumph at the knowledge that the *Colima* had managed to touch up the enemy, after all. A German interrupted his scrutiny by grabbing his arm and thrusting him toward the hatch.

"The lifeboat? It is not safe for ladies. . . ."

It was Von Poleski's voice, but he heard no more as his head passed through the hatch. Below, men were hurrying along the brightly lighted interior, calling to each other loudly. The familiar smell of hot oil drifted up about him.

He heard a Diesel engine cough tentatively, and then through the open door of the engine room came the chutter of valves as the boat surged forward. Before he turned to go forward behind his guide, he glanced up again. Lentz and the mate were coming down the ladder. Behind them he was almost sure that he saw Alice Langley staring calmly down at him. He stumbled forward with his head buzzing, suddenly conscious of an overpowering weakness.

CHAPTER II

THE GERMAN RAIDER

THE *U-161* was a late boat, a beautifully complex organism alive with a sense of restrained power that pulsated through her in a ceaseless current of minor, almost imperceptible vibrations. Underway or hove to, submerged or on the surface, she had an air of readiness, of restrained eagerness for unlimited exertion. The drive of her propellers flowed so easily through her hull into the surrounding water that the power itself seemed to be a manifestation of some mysteriously remote influence.

Although he knew submarines, Needham, completely idle underway in one for the first time in his life, found it fascinating to sort and interpret the multitude of impressions that reached him through the constant flow of familiar sounds. Exhausted and suffering from loss of blood, he remembered little of the first few hours after he came aboard.

On recovering consciousness, he found himself ironed to a bunk in the torpedo room. Lentz, the mate and Jones were close beside him. They could tell him little more. The three of them had been herded down the hatch right after him. Miss Langley was aboard. Von Poleski had kept her on the pretext that the lifeboat was leaking, had been stove in when it came alongside of the submarine. Occasionally they could see her going in and out of one of the officers' rooms aft and had guessed that she was looking out for the first officer who apparently was badly wounded. She had come forward once to look at Needham's wound, but with Von Poleski standing by, there had been no opportunity to question her. She seemed quite unworried and, Lentz added with a chuckle, was quite able to handle Von Poleski. He, apparently, was in charge of the boat until the first officer was able to get up.

Absorbed in watching what was going on, neither Lentz nor Needham cared to talk much at first. The latter's wounds, although painful, were not serious, and for a time he was content to forget what lay ahead of him in trying to understand as much as possible of what he saw and heard. Lentz, who had carefully concealed his ability to understand German, managed to pick up a great deal of information from the scraps of conversation that he could overhear.

From their compartment right in the bow of the boat they could see clear aft to the control room which lay directly under the conning tower. By leaning down from their bunks they could even see through it to the after compartment and the engine room, but the intervening fittings, and men moving about in the one passageway, made it difficult to make out much that went on aft of the control room.

In her general arrangement the boat did not differ materially from an American submarine. The long, narrow interior was divided into watertight compartments by transverse bulkheads. Amidships of the control room was the general operating compartment from which she was maneuvered when submerged and to which all communications led. Forward and aft of it were the largest compartments on the ship, in which the men lived. Under them were the storage batteries that supplied power to the motors when she was submerged. Beyond these two compartments were the torpedo and engine compartments in the bow and stern respectively.

It was the two compartments just aft of them that interested the prisoners most. The forward battery compartment, in addition to bunks for half the crew, contained several very small rooms for the officers, and others which Needham judged were for the radio instruments and storage of special equipment. He guessed that the after battery compartment was largely given over to the engineers' force, as it would be on an American submarine.

Because the torpedo compartment was fairly well filled with racks and work benches, the men who occupied it spent most of their spare time in the battery compartment, leaving the prisoners alone most of the time. None of the Germans seemed to care how much the Americans discovered of the workings of their craft. What little attention they paid to their prisoners seemed to be inspired more by a desire for amusement than by any suspicion that the latter might benefit from their position. Needham and Lentz both confirmed their impression that the men were new to submarines, if not to all ships.

THEY soon learned that their shell had materially damaged the submarine. Much of the time she cruised in surface trim. Submerged she never seemed to venture much beyond periscope depth. Even more significant was the fact that her pumps were running constantly while she was submerged. Twice when the motors were temporarily stopped they heard the unmistakable sound of falling water in the control room, an ominous warning that they saw, was not lost on the crew.

Lentz finally managed to pick up a fairly definite idea of the damage by listening to the talk. The shell had just missed striking the conning tower. It had ripped open the false hull and had sheered enough rivets at the junction of the conning tower and the pressure hull to seriously impair her ability to dive. Evidently whatever repairs had been effected only resisted the pressure at or near the surface. One officer and three men at the gun had been carried overboard and two men besides the first officer had been wounded.

The knowledge that the submarine had not escaped unscathed was a satisfaction to the prisoners as they contemplated their uninviting future. Lentz could learn very little of what she planned to do. The men did not appear to know whether she would make for home or continue her attack on shipping. On the course that she appeared to be steering, she might either be heading for one of the Belgian bases via the Channel or making for the favorite hunting ground off the Irish coast. Either alternative offered little comfort to the prisoners, knowing what they did of her condition and the doubtful ability of Von Poleski and his crew.

During those first days they noticed other things less obvious, but even more disquieting, than the material defects. Von Poleski's deficiencies as a submarine officer became glaringly apparent. He handled the boat with a lack of precision that was maddening to Lentz and Needham. It could not all be laid to his knowledge of her damaged condition. Many of the men, too, reflected their commanding officer's ineptitude in a careless, faltering execution of orders that made each maneuver a trial of nerves to everyone on board. At such times Von Poleski's voice echoed from the control room in angry shouts that so confused the men that they bungled the most simple tasks. The atmosphere in the boat became a ridiculous caricature of the smooth coordination upon which the very existence of a submarine depends.

In spite of his new responsibilities Von Poleski found time to amuse himself with Alice Langley. He seemed to invent occasions to intercept her on her way in and out of the first officer's room, and although he could hear none of their conversation, Needham could see by her expression that she gave the German no encouragement.

Late on the third night Lentz woke Needham and pointed aft. The boat was hove to in surface trim. She had finished charging batteries and now appeared to be waiting for something. Before going to sleep Needham and Lentz had tried to guess what she was doing and had decided that she must be waiting for another U-boat. Now Needham saw Von Poleski talking with the radio operator. He would walk aft, and, after disappearing in the control room momentarily, would come hurrying back and accost the enlisted man with angry impatience.

"Been at that for an hour," Lentz whispered. "Waitin' for something over the radio."

Needham nodded sleepily.

"What do you think he's up to, sir?" Lentz persisted.

"Probably trying to get dope on the position of new mine fields or the Channel nets. Wants to go home that way."

He dropped off to sleep again, only to be aroused some time later by an unusual stir among the crew. They were leaving their bunks and talking excitedly in low tones, looking often toward the control room, moving about and laughing nervously. A subtle tension had invaded the boat. The men looked both frightened and eager. She was under way again, driving forward at full speed; fourteen or fifteen knots, judging from the wash of the water against the hull.

The prisoners estimated that it was late in the forenoon when the boat stopped and submerged. She lay with periscopes out, apparently waiting again. The tension among the men increased visibly. They left routine work without orders and stood stiffly at their action stations. In the control room Von Poleski rarely removed his eyes from the periscope.

"Layin' for something," Lentz remarked, pointing at the German officer. Needham nodded without reply, his mind turning over the possibilities of this new development.

AT LAST two of the torpedo men fell into a conversation at the tubes just forward of the tier of bunks. Lentz listened eagerly and Needham, watching, knew that he was learning something at last. When the men went aft to dinner Lentz spoke hurriedly.

"He's goin' to take a shot at a convoy! A troop convoy! Somehow they got dope over the radio that right here is where the destroyers relieve the cruisers."

"What's the idea?" the mate asked.

"Why, they're apt to be a little careless while they are changing formation," Needham explained. "The destroyers come out from Queenstown to meet them, you know, and the cruisers turn around and head back for New York. They'll be making signals and won't be so apt to keep a close watch."

He purposely avoided mentioning his own opinion of what Von Poleski was attempting. A troop convoy! The most carefully guarded ships of all. And the *U-161* unable to maneuver freely, unable to go down to any real depth. A look of grim understanding passed between the two submarine men, and for a short while they fell silent.

If he had known less of the personnel of the submarine, Needham would have thought that the project was the result of a carefully thought out plan, built up with painstaking attention to every possible chance. But knowing Von Poleski, he was sure that it was just another evidence of that officer's ignorance of the capabilities and the limitations of submarines. He could imagine what had inspired the German officer to attempt it. As yet no successful attack had been made upon an Atlantic troop convoy. The fact in itself was sufficient proof of the care with which the safety of the ships had been provided for. And, of course, instant fame would come to the successful submarine commander.

Von Poleski was probably already picturing himself receiving the adulation of an admiring country, the hero of a feat that would startle the naval world. The fact that he, himself, believed that the thing could be done, did not make Needham's mind any easier. For in the qualities that such a trial would demand of a submarine, he knew the *U-161* to be wofully lacking. And the greatest danger lay in the personality of her temporary commanding officer. Wedel might have done it, Needham thought. Even now, if by any chance he was able to get out of his bunk, he might save the boat.

For the first time in years Needham found himself trying to ignore vivid pictures of what happens in a submarine when she goes down—and stays down. The sudden, terriffic concussion, or the trivial mistake that spells disaster; the rush of water and instant oblivion. Or the long, silent wait while the air grows thick and the slow, stubborn cold of the bottom creeps up numbing limbs to one's brain.

He had heard depth charges—from a safe distance—and had heard stories of British submarines that had felt them. The vast, stunning jar of the first concussion; abrupt darkness, and the gurgle of water pouring in through opened seams.

But the mate and Jones had felt the gloom that had descended upon their more experienced companions.

"How close do they have to drop one of those ash cans, sir, to do the business?"

Needham started at Jones' question, and his reply, when he gave it after a slight pause, was needlessly gruff.

"Depends on the size. Anywhere from twenty to a hundred yards."

"Do you see much gear that you recognize on this ship?" The mate asked to fill the pause that followed.

"Quite a bit," Needham answered with relief, glad to change the subject. "She's a good boat. With Lentz here, and my old crowd from the *K-12*, we could take her over right now."

"Well, I don't know anything about submarines—" the mate stopped in the middle of his sentence to listen to a gruff order in the control room—"but this officer acts like a landsman to me."

"Feel her now!" Lentz exclaimed. "He's tryin' to trim her down by the head. Just ordered 'em to blow some tank aft—There!" he added after another pause while they felt the stern surge upward. "If he didn't kick her screws out on top, I'm a yeoman."

"Must be quite a sea running," Needham remarked, unwilling to dwell upon the implications of the situation.

Even at what they judged to be a depth of fifty feet or more, the boat rolled heavily. During the long morning the violent motion had kept up monotonously, but the tension still continued. The four men moved restlessly in their bunks, the blind, helpless futility of their predicament wearing on their taut nerves. To Needham and the mate it seemed like a special seaman's hell to be entering a crisis at sea in which they would be denied all direct knowledge of events. At first, the former had rather enjoyed being on a submarine again while the mate, ignorant of the meaning of most of the maneuvers, had been thoroughly frightened. But as time passed, and he saw the apparent ease with which the boat was handled, he had accepted her with little more thought than he would have given to any craft in which he might be serving. Needham, equipped with more experience with which to judge the ability of the crew, had gradually lost his confidence, until now he found himself starting nervously at every slight variation in sound.

SUDDENLY he gasped, as the full significance of the submarine's actions dawned upon him. When Lentz had given them the substance of the conversation between the torpedo men, he had been too astonished at the recklessness of Von Poleski's plan to connect it with the events of the preceding night. Now he was appalled by the suspicion that struck him. The submarine must have been informed of the exact position of the rendezvous for the convoy, information so vital that the destroyers themselves going out to meet approaching convoys were not given it until they were at sea.

If the Germans had the code in which it was sent, sooner or later they would concentrate a number of submarines in an attack that could not fail to sink several transports. Instantly he forgot their own position in contemplating the seriousness of the situation for the whole convoy system. One, or at most two, successful attacks would betray the truth to the Allies, but one successful attack meant hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of lives.

Another thing: was the *U-161* waiting now to take part in such an attack? He doubted it, for there had been no indication that she had spoken other submarines during the night, and it was unlikely that such an enterprise would be undertaken without consultation between the boats. But even one boat, poorly handled, might do much if she were there on the spot, waiting for a convoy that she knew was coming. And such an attack would be taken as a mere coincidence. Nobody would suspect that the submarine had been posted there to wait.

His mind shifted to the problem of getting word to the Allies; and realizing how completely helpless he and his companions were, he despaired of doing it even in the apparently unlikely event that the *U-161* survived her attempt. Nevertheless, he settled down to a methodical scrutiny of every possibility of communicating, either before or after he and the others reached their ultimate destination in some prison camp.

A few minutes later a swift change in the atmosphere about him interrupted his thoughts. At a hurried shout, men appeared suddenly in the passageway, their heads all turned toward the control room. An officer scrambled out of a doorway and ran aft pulling on his blouse. A flood of men swarmed into the torpedo room as the boat heeled over under full rudder. The hum of the motors built up to a maximum pitch, and the hull vibrated to a measured beat.

"Now what's up?" The mate looked around inquiringly.

The clang of the alarm bell answered his question. It filled the boat with hard, metallic noise and then stopped abruptly. Men clustered about the nest of torpedo tubes, scanning gauges and twirling valves. Air sighed in the valves aft, and somewhere a pump labored mightily. The boat righted as she came around, and then the angle of the deck steepened as the bow went down.

One of the men at the tubes said something to the others and they all looked around at the prisoners. A wrench clanged on the iron floor plates, and the hand that reached to retrieve it trembled violently. Instead of a tense eagerness, the bearing of the men was taut with poorly concealed hysteria.

"Listen, sir. Do you get that?" Lentz held up his hand. And after a moment, underneath all the other noises, a soft droning hum gradually became audible. Outside of the thin hull plating, the sea suddenly seemed crowded, filling with hurrying life.

"I hear it," the mate announced, after listening intently. "What is it? Sounds like machinery somehow, only softer—away off."

"It is machinery," Needham said quietly. "But not away off. Those are propellers, a lot of them—and close."

One of the men at the tubes laughed nervously with a curious, listening expression. Another growled a curse. Needham could hear orders being given in the control room and knew that Von Poleski was trimming his boat as she drove forward. He leaned down until he could see the gleaming metal tube of the periscope sliding down into its well. The drone of propellers overhead grew louder. Everywhere men stood at their stations, pale and tense, fear mingling with doubt in their faces. Von Poleski's voice was plainly audible. It was loud, a little too loud.

Miss Langley appeared in the doorway of the first officer's room. She looked about uncertainly, hesitated as if she was going aft, then turned and walked quickly toward the torpedo room. The men paid no attention to her. Needham, watching her thin, pale face and the lines around her mouth, suddenly realized that the strain had forced her to drop her habitual slight smile. He wanted to say something encouraging, express something of the admiration that welled up in him as he noted the quick lift of her chin, but he could find no words.

"The officer—Wedel." She stood over Needham's bunk. "What is going on? He wants to get up and he isn't able . . . What is that noise?" She had caught the sound of the propellers overhead.

"I'm sorry." Needham ignored her last question. "Wedel ought to be in charge now. What kind of shape is——"

"Is this a troop convoy that we are attacking?" she interrupted with a gesture of impatience at his effort to turn aside her question. "Would he call off the attack?"

Needham couldn't blame her for her fears. He was badly frightened himself. But in spite of his brief contact with Wedel he had gained considerable respect for that officer's ability. He hesitated then answered lightly:

"Why, it isn't as bad as that, Miss Langley. We aren't in much danger."

She smiled surprisingly.

"Not much danger with that—tin soldier in charge?" She nodded toward the control room. Then her face grew serious again. "Wedel is awfully weak, but he insists upon coming out. And I suspect that torpedos don't often miss—when he fires them. He, as I suppose you noticed, is a real officer—and a gentleman," she added with quiet conviction.

At the addition, Needham was conscious of a sudden wave of quite unreasonable jealousy for the German first officer. But he agreed with the opinion.

"And with Von Poleski in charge, it is just possible that one of the torpedo boats up there will bag us——"

But she was gone before he had finished, leaving the four men wondering whether she intended to hold the wounded commander in his bunk.

THE hum of propellers grew louder. All sense of time faded in the minds of the prisoners. It seemed to be hours since they had first heard the threatening hum. Unconsciously Jones tugged at the handcuff that locked him to his bunk. At the slight noise one of the petty officers at the tubes, the one who appeared to be in charge, turned and looked appraisingly at them. Then with a muttered word to the others he came over and produced a key with which he unlocked their irons. Several of the other Germans protested, but he silenced them with an angry growl.

"Told them to go to hell," Lentz translated, forgetting for the moment that he was not supposed to understand German.

But the petty officer was too preoccupied to pay any attention to Lentz's words.

He motioned to them to stay in the compartment and turned away, ignoring Needham's thanks. They sat up gratefully.

The boat was moving slowly now. First her bow would surge upward as if she was going to broach, then she would falter and slip swiftly downward. Lentz looked significently at Needham.

"Ain't trimmin' well," he explained for the benefit of the others. "I don't like the feel of her."

It was quite plain from the expression on the other three faces that none of them were enjoying the performance.

Needham was counting the steps necessary to reach the escape hatch in the battery compartment. If anything went wrong it was just possible that the four of them could make a rush for it, haul the girl out of Wedel's room and ram her up through the hatch. The boat would be quite apt to broach momentarily, if she was hit—probably would with her bow light, this way.

"Queer, Von Poleski didn't trim her down," he thought.

The periscope went up again and Needham saw a hand reach over toward the firing button. It hung poised, the boat steadied somewhat. The vibration of many propellers pounded against, and through, the shell plating.

The poised hand punched the button. A red light winked above the port upper torpedo tube.

"Now, down!" Needham gasped aloud, unconsciously coaching the submarine. But the boat lingered with her periscope up. Von Poleski was indulging his curiosity, watching the torpedo's run. Needham felt sweat coming out all over his body as he watched the hands on the periscope handles turning it slowly as if there was no enemy within miles.

Abruptly the German officer bellowed orders. The periscope slid swiftly downward. Men flitted back and forth across the door of the control room. The bow tilted downward. But Lentz and Needham paled as they listened to a louder, sharper note above the sound of the other propellers.

"Divin' with his rudders!" Lentz exclaimed. "An' they're right after us!"

The boat seemed to hang motionless, suspended just below the surface. In imagination they could see the swirl of the screws on top of the water, see the destroyers sight it and charge forward. At another command the whole crew of the boat rushed forward to bring her bow down quickly. The noise outside swelled to a deafening roar, a terrifying sound that seemed to shake and rack the whole fabric about them. Needham, jammed in the midst of a crowd of panting men, edged toward the doorway, reached out and gripped a stanchion, instinctively bracing himself for the shock of the collision. He could almost see the sharp bow of the destroyer cleaving through the side of the submarine. Staring wide eyed at each other, holding their breaths, they waited.

"Missed!" Lentz gasped at last.

The roar waned swiftly. But neither he nor Needham relaxed. They were silently counting the seconds until the depth charges let go.

A stunning shock lifted the boat and shook her in a frenzy of violence. The lights went out abruptly, in the midst of a tremendous eruption of noise. The throb of the motors was cut off instantly, while the men, flung headlong, floated on a vast soft wave of concussion, conscious but with senses dulled. The unyielding reality of the steel floor plates was almost a relief, something familiar, solid in a universe that had suddenly disintegrated. They picked themselves up weakly, amazed that they were still alive, stumbling with a sickening sense of utter bewilderment.

The boat lurched drunkenly, faltered and then plunged downward. The thick, damp darkness seemed to close in about them while they listened tensely for the final rush of water. Von Poleski's voice came from aft, a high shrill caricature of his usual confident tone. The boat quivered slightly, and then the soft throb of the motors resumed. The sensation of falling died away and she struggled slowly back to an even keel.

The depth charges were still exploding almost continuously, but after the violence of the first they all seemed remote, harmless. They were, in fact, receding, as the destroyers above wove the intricate design of their attack pattern on a sea that was already slashed and torn by the wakes of their own propellers.

Under fifty feet of troubled water the *U-161* crawled off in a stunned daze, waiting for the end. It seemed impossible that she could escape. Unable to dive and unable to come up, for the moment hardly able to control her horizontal motion, she was like a blind, stricken animal stumbling on the brink of the mile deep chasm that lay under her. Seconds dragged on into minutes and still the terrifying, shuddering concussions kept up.

The men who had crowded into the bow straggled back to their stations, stumbling against each other in the darkness, cursing in shrill whispers. Without the spur of leadership to force their attention back to their mechanical duties, they were still dazed, their minds numbed by the inconceivable power of the attack. In the intervals between the explosions the rumble of the hunting propellers was still plainly audible, reaching them more distinctly now that the volume of sound from the convoy was dying away.

When the lights of the auxiliary circuit came on at last, they disclosed drawn, haggard faces turned toward the control room, men standing with bent heads listening to the splash of water pouring in through the leak. A pump pounded against the heavy pressure outside. That sound and the smoother hum from aft were morsels of comfort in the general despair that had fallen upon them all. Except for the order to start the motors, Von Poleski had given no sign of life.

NEEDHAM found himself in the battery compartment, feeling for the door of Wedel's room. As he turned to steal back he heard the pump and wondered dumbly if the shock had opened more seams. Then he thought of the destroyers' listening gear. At any moment now they would stop their engines to listen. And here was a fine racket for them to pick up. He tried to see what was going on aft, stopped in the doorway of the torpedo room to listen. Nothing but the steady splash of water. The men that he could see stood like wax figures, still dazed, waiting in almost pathetic helplessness for orders.

Where was Von Poleski? He moved back a few paces and saw the German standing with his hand still braced above the torpedo firing button as if he had come back to that as soon as he had picked himself up after the first concussion. Beyond the officer, Needham could see that the needle of the depth gauge was comfortably steady. But Von Poleski was staring at it with dumb fascination. The tableau may have continued for one minute—or ten. Needham himself could not tell. It was a picture of stark horror, a complete loss of the pretense of self-assurance that all men try to keep between themselves and their fellows. He repressed an impulse to go aft and shock them out of their paralysis, force them to do something, anything that would restore their shattered nerves.

The motors still throbbed on. And already he thought he could detect a slight lessening of the noise of propellers above, as if one destroyer, at least, had already stopped to listen. Why didn't someone think of stopping the submarine's motors?

A haggard figure appeared in the door of the first officer's room, staggered weakly and lurched aft. Before Needham had fully realized that it was Wedel, he heard the latter's voice, weak but quite unexcited. Men jumped with astonishment, but they obeyed instantly. The beat of the motors was cut off; then the pump. All movement inside of the boat was instantly stopped. In the abrupt cessation of noise the wash of water outside died away slowly. The sound of the propellers seemed to be louder, more threatening. The boat shuddered ominously as a final depth charge let go; then a vast stillness closed in about her. The destroyers, too, had stopped their engines, were concentrating all their efforts upon the chance of hearing the beat of the submarine's screw or the slight vibration of some forgotten auxiliary.

The momentary relief at the end of the depth charge attack quickly disappeared in the sense of utter isolation that crept into the boat out of the silence. Even the soft rustle of water against the hull died away. Men held their breaths, knowing that any instant might bring the abrupt explosion that would rip their shelter wide open to the sea. The thought of the cordon of destroyers up there on the surface, intent, eager to run down the slightest sound, plucked at shaken nerves.

Needham could hear Wedel speaking rapidly to Von Poleski, a note of calm assurance that was grateful in the surcharged atmosphere of the submarine. Von Poleski was chewing at his sadly draggled mustache, evidently at a loss for a reply to his superior's reprimand. He was making an evident effort to recover his composure, but his face was almost as pale as Wedel's. After a moment, the latter started over toward the track chart upon which the approach had been plotted. But his knees sagged and he turned weakly to go back to his room, apparently unable to stand any longer.

BECOMING suddenly aware of someone standing beside him, Needham turned and saw Alice Langley in the door of the first officer's room.

"Nice game you navy men have invented," she whispered with a wan smile and pointed upward. He saw the old glint of amusement in her eyes. "I know what that old line about the rat in the trap means, now."

"The worst is over," he announced with a confidence that sounded unconvincing even to himself.

"Who let you out?" she asked, keeping up a pretense of banter that deceived neither of them.

"What about Wedel? Did you—did he——"

"No, I didn't tie him in his bunk." She laughed again. "But I did lay down the law to him about getting up. Told him I'd not be responsible for his recovery if he did. Which, of course, was just funny with those depth charges going off all around us—" She stopped suddenly and looked over Needham's shoulder.

Wedel was coming toward them. He betrayed no surprise when he looked up and saw Needham. He nodded and then raised his eyebrows with a weak smile.

"You see, your friends are faithful in their attentions. I regret the shaking we gave you. It was nearly—unfortunate."

Needham was shocked to see how weak the man was. He was making a great effort now to keep on his feet. But as the American officer turned to go forward, he restrained him with a gesture.

"No, don't go. You must excuse me, but I have no wish to interrupt your conversation. Miss Langley, I fear, has had little rest since she came aboard. She has been very good." He pushed aside the curtains of his door and disappeared.

Needham looked at Alice in surprise.

"Oh, he's a brick all right," she said with feeling. "He doesn't know Von Poleski has kept you ironed. I'll tell him about it now, if you wish. He has been too sick to care about anything—delirious most of the time."

"Please don't!" Needham exclaimed, yielding to a sudden impulse. "I'd really rather not. We would be more or less on parole, you know, if they gave us the run of the boat. I have reasons——"

"You haven't any idea of trying to escape?" she whispered eagerly. "You know I——"

"No, it's nothing as definite as that," Needham said hurriedly, to forestall more questions. He was unwilling to speak of the very vague idea that he had been able to evolve until it had taken more definite shape.

"Are those destroyers going to locate us?" she asked, seeing that he did not wish to pursue the subject further.

"Not if these people have sense enough to lie here all day and make no noise. The torpedo boats have the whole ocean to drop their ash cans in. They're not nearly as good as they think they are. Had a bit of luck on that first one. But this boat is well built. She'll stand a lot more than this and still get in under her own power." It was second nature for him to defend submarines, and he spoke earnestly without any sense of incongruity.

"This leak, then," she pointed to the sheet of water that rippled back and forth across the deck of the control room, "isn't going to get us?"

"Not right off." In spite of his assumed carelessness his tone was not quite convincing. "Have to go a bit light on diving. No, with a good man handling her—like Wedel there—we'd have no trouble ditching those destroyers."

"Treason!" In the grim tension of the boat it was good to hear her laugh. "I believe you'd like to join the enemy."

"I'd like to get a chance to handle this bucket," he answered with a grin. "With a real crew aboard. But these wharf rats, here—they aren't submarine people."

"Submarine men are usually—angelic?"

Her eyes were dancing again. Abruptly they darkened. And as Needham turned to see what had caused her change in expression, he was flung violently sideways against one of the bunks.

"Swine!" Von Poleski snarled at him as he thrust Alice into the door of her room and pulled the door shut. Something struck Needham a glancing blow on the side of the head, and before he could recover his balance Von Poleski hit him again in the mouth, knocking him back against the door of the radio room. He had a confused impression of men running toward him. Then his eyes cleared and he put all his weight behind a blow at the officer. Although it did not land fairly, Von Poleski stumbled backward and Needham leaped at him again. Three or four men charged in on him from behind, and he went down in a tangle of arms and legs.

SEEING what was going on, the other three prisoners came aft on the run, the mate in the lead. Before any of the Germans could intercept them, Von Poleski spoke sharply above the clamor. For an instant even the men who were trying to secure Needham paused and looked up. The German officer straightened up with a drawn pistol. For an instant he hesitated, watching the charging prisoners with an expression of pleased anticipation.

The report of the gun was deafening in the confined space. A tiny black hole appeared in the center of the mate's white undershirt. He stumbled, half turned and went down in a heap. The pistol shifted to Lentz, wavered and dropped to Von Poleski's side as he motioned the men on with his other hand. Instantly all the helpless frenzy of the hunted seemed to explode in them. They flung themselves at their prisoners as if they suddenly realized that here was an opportunity to lay their hands on the enemy who was even then holding over them the silent threat of the depth charges.

Lentz swung once, twice, and went down before the rush. Jones, slightly behind him and momentarily shielded by the chief's broad form, snatched up a heavy copper kettle and swung it down on the first man to reach him. It came up again gleaming in the dull light, swung in a short arc and another man crumpled. The Germans fell against each other, beside themselves with fury. The kettle appeared once more then was gone in a grunting, snarling heap of men who thrashed about on the floor, trying to reach the two Americans.

Overwhelmed by numbers, beaten, kicked and barely conscious the three prisoners were dragged to their feet. A dozen men tried to reach them, still half insane by the sudden explosion of rage in their fear tortured minds. But Von Poleski evidently did not want to expend any more prisoners. He uttered a short command and the majority of the men fell back. The officer eyed the battered face of the American officer with a cold gleam of satisfaction. Then, smiling slightly, he waved to the men to drag the prisoners forward. Jones was unconscious, the other two had stopped struggling and allowed themselves to be hustled along without a backward look.

For a long time after the shooting, the Germans hung around the door of the torpedo room, unwilling to return to the terrifying monotony of waiting. They jeered and hooted at the prisoners, unrestrained by Von Poleski. The Americans gave them little satisfaction. Needham, after satisfying himself that Jones was not seriously injured, fell back into a bitter review of their situation. As his glance rested for an instant upon the sprawling form of the mate, where it had been flung in a corner, an overwhelming desire to strike back at their captors strengthened his resolve to find a way to escape.

Quiet returned to the boat. Outwardly it was the same atmosphere of impending disaster. But the emotional explosion had effected a subtle change in them all. The helpless rage of the Germans for their invisible enemies had crystallized into a concentration of hatred for the three representatives of the Allies. Only their fear of Von Poleski restrained them from attacking the men where they lay helpless in their bunks.

Needham and Lentz, too, had changed. What had been before only a vague wish that they had even a remote possibility of escape, had altered now to a grim certainty that they would find some way to avenge the mate. Needham already had entertained a wild idea for obtaining the information that he was sure Von Poleski had. Before the struggle, and the entirely unnecessary murder of the mate had inflamed his mind, he had dismissed it as impossible. Now he went about planning as if the scheme that he slowly evolved was easily possible.

"How d'you feel?" At Lentz's question

Needham turned and saw that Jones was conscious.

"Rocky." The youngster grinned, raising a manacled hand to his head. "Feel as if the mainmast had fell on me."

"Legs and arms all right?" Lentz asked.

"Yes," Jones answered, after moving them cautiously. "An' I beaned a few of them birds aplenty, too, with that kettle of mine."

"I'll say you did," Lentz agreed. "One of them fell on me. And he won't worry about no ash cans for the rest of this day. He's out for a while, that bird is."

"Kill him?" Jones asked, horror mingling with his desire to avenge the mate. It was the first time that he had ever seen men go at each other with murder in their minds.

" 'Fraid not," Lentz replied with sincere regret. "But if you didn't break his head, I'm a leatherneck."

Needham was once more lost in thought. He now saw a bare chance to communicate with the Allies, if they could only manage to get out of their irons. Although that one obstacle seemed insurmountable, he refused to give up hope. Again and again he scanned the compartment for some tool that would enable them to force the locks, hoping that sooner or later something would be left within reach.

The day ended uneventfully. After hours of breathless waiting, the motors were started cautiously. At first they were stopped frequently to listen for sounds of pursuit, but only the whisper of water broke the stillness. Reassured at last, the submarine silently fled from the scene of her escape. With the motors humming smoothly, and every minute taking them farther from the possibility of discovery, the tension in the boat visibly lessened. Most of the men turned in; a few, still too keyed up to sleep, gathered in the battery compartment and talked.

ALONG toward morning, when the motors stopped, every man jumped up instantly. Reassured by a rush of cool air, they clustered about the escape hatch eager for the word to shift to surface trim. Before the clatter of the engines announced that the charging of the batteries had started, the prisoners were left alone below except for a few men clear aft in the engine room.

As the fresh air drifted down to them, they filled their lungs gratefully. Needham looked aft at the deserted compartments and thought how easy it would be to broadcast a warning if they could only free themselves for five minutes. As if to tantalize him, the radio operator appeared in the door of his room, stretched himself wearily and disappeared again.

"Look who's comin'!" Lentz muttered.

Alice Langley came out into the passageway and, after assuring herself that she was unobserved, came forward hurriedly.

"I know what happened to the mate," she said as she reached them. "They shut me in the room—but I heard." She stooped over Jones and pretended to inspect his bruised face. "I want to ask you something: would this boat's code books be very valuable to the Allies?"

"Yes, if they got them in a hurry—before the Germans knew they were lost." Needham tried to conceal the sudden hope in his face.

"I don't mean the ordinary codes. Von Poleski has something more than that," she went on hurriedly. "Something new. He boasts to me, hints at having something important. He has something—it's on two or three sheets of paper, blue paper, loose sheets—that he got from Wedel's desk last night."

"What time? When did he use it?" Needham's eyes lighted eagerly.

"It was late. I saw the radio man come to his door. I was in Wedel's room. Von Poleski came in, looking highly pleased with himself. Paid no attention to me; got those sheets of paper and went out again. It had something to do with the convoy, I'm sure of that."

"Why?"

"Because he had been waiting for something. He was in the radio room a dozen times last evening. Some message came and he rushed for those papers, compared the message with them as he went out of Wedel's door—" She stopped at the sound of steps coming down the ladder. Turning to go, she dropped something beside Needham's hand. "I've been after this all day. Found it on Von Poleski's desk."

Needham's fingers closed on a key. He hastily rolled over until he could not be seen from aft and fitted the key into his irons. The other two, watching eagerly, gasped their relief when it turned.

"Can you beat that now, sir? Can you beat that?" Lentz exclaimed admiringly, looking after the girl. Then as he caught the hope in Needham's face, he asked: "On the chance that these Jerries has some dope that we could salvage, what do you think, Mister Needham? Is they a chance of doing anything with it?"

"With luck—and this looks like luck," Needham answered, pointing to the key. "I've an idea—" He stopped absently and lapsed into a brown study.

Lentz lay back with a sigh, as if the assurance cleared away the only doubt in his mind.

"Well, we'll dope out something before morning," he said drowsily, and in five minutes he was sleeping as peacefully as if he were miles from war zones and damaged submarines.

The sea was working up before a rising wind. Unwilling to attempt the long, hard trip around the northern end of the British Isles, Von Poleski was laying down a course for Lands End and the Channel. If the wind held, there was a good chance for foggy weather; and, given fog, the patrol infested water of the Channel would be passable. The persistence of the leak bothered Von Poleski, reminding him continually that the more he traveled in surface trim the better would be his chance to bring her into port. The Channel barrage was the one serious obstacle; and that, he knew, could be passed on the surface, provided it had not been greatly improved since the *U-161* had left port.

After a few hours, the sea settled down to a long swell that slipped smoothly under the thickening fog and allowed the submarine to pass without a ripple to betray her to a chance trawler. During the long nights that followed, the men took advantage of every possible excuse to remain on the topside. There the fog seemed to isolate them from the world, strengthening the sense of security that the open air gave them. Below, the echo of the depth charges clung in the back of their minds, keeping alive the horror of those helpless hours.

Von Poleski quietly encouraged their new practice of collecting on deck whenever the weather permitted, making it apparent that he preferred to have the forward battery compartment to himself—and Miss Langley. He thought that she had changed in her attitude toward him since the escape from the destroyers. At last he felt that she was reacting to what he considered to be his charm. Wedel was worse again, apparently weakened by his attempt to take charge. Von Poleski was willing to wait. He strongly suspected that his superior officer would not live until they reached port. In the meanwhile, he was satisfied to amuse himself with the girl.

CHAPTER III

LIMPING HOME

IN THE middle of a moonless night the *U-161* crept up the Channel toward the Folkestone barrage. Trimmed down until only half of her conning tower projected above the black water, she appeared as a vague thickening of the gray mist that hung low on the surface. The tide was full, slapping against the sides of the conning tower and boiling in a white swirl where the gun broke surface as a swell passed over her. A slight breeze stirred rare white caps on the crests of long, easy seas. The silent figures on the conning tower stared anxiously into the thick darkness ahead. Tension and breathless stillness had again closed around the boat.

Somewhere close ahead they knew that the mine barrage barred the depths to submarines. On the surface the way was clear, except for the ceaseless patrol of surface craft, waiting with ready guns to drive the enemy below. Or at least, Von Poleski assured himself, a week before the surface had been clear of mines. But in war a week is a long time. Biting at his mustache there in the darkness, the German officer tried not to think of what happens to submarines when they bump mines.

Twice already they had caught vague glimpses of moving objects in the darkness. With stopped motors, they had drifted back with the tide. Once they had been sure, had seen the silent swift passage of a destroyer, slipping across the tide, dark and threatening, almost invisible. The other interruption of their passage had been less certain. A half heard voice coming downwind, a suspicion of solidity in the darkness; then nothing. Now, approaching the barrage itself, the boat was slowly coming up, preparing to man her gun and be ready to strike back if one of the swarms of drifters happened to sight her.

With scarcely a murmur of the water alongside, she rose until her whole length rolled easily on the surface. At a soft order through the voice tube, the forward hatch opened, men appeared about the gun. Once a shell case clanked dully, and Von Poleski leaned over, hissing curses, afraid to raise his voice. The fog drifted in more thickly, winding about the high conning tower and drifting wetly against their faces.

She was still using the more silent motors, with men standing ready to throw in the engines if discovery destroyed the necessity for silence. The man beside Von Poleski coughed slightly and the officer thrust him violently toward the hatch. Silence again, stark, tense silence that tugged at worn nerves. Men thought of other boats, stories of mysterious disappearances—the long roll of submarines that had failed to return. Here around them was the graveyard of many of them. The dank air seemed to be peopled with the ghosts of those who had failed to pass the barrage.

Ten minutes went by. Twenty minutes. Nothing moved but the quiet water slipping in a smooth black stream alongside. A man scraped his foot on the deck, a slight, rasping sound. A ripple of suppressed terror ran through the others. Their eyes dilated and their mouths opened as they imagined a mine bumping alongside in the second that it took them to realize their mistake. But they walked carefully after that. A half hour. Nothing had changed: the same silence, the same wet fog clinging around men's shoulders; a chill reminder of the greater stillness in the depths below.

Von Poleski peered at the luminous dial of his watch and resumed his rigid pose. The boat should be right over the barrage now. Two, three minutes went by. Then, just as he breathed a trifle more freely, across the water came the sound of a man clearing his throat. It was a harmless, familiar sound, but the Germans gasped and stared in the direction of the noise. A voice muttered something in English, coming from the darkness close alongside. Von Poleski's heart pounded as he tried to make out the words. But he could make out nothing but the calm tone.

On the submarine's deck, nobody dared breathe. Another voice, deeper, more resonant, laughed briefly. Low down on the water a momentary gleam of phosphorescent light marked the stem of a moving ship. It drew aft silently and a gasp ran through the group of men as it disappeared.

DOWN in the empty torpedo room the prisoners had sensed the new emergency. By piecing together scraps of news that Lentz had gathered, Needham interpreted it rightly. Neither of the two mentioned the barrage. Jones scarcely knew of its existence. The others looked at each other significantly and concentrated their attention behind their hearing. When the foot scraped on deck above their heads, making a startling, rasping noise that resounded through the whole boat, Needham paled suddenly. The muscles of his cheeks grew taut; then he smiled a trifle foolishly as he identified the sound.

"Is it the Channel barrage?"

All three started at the voice and looked up to see Alice Langley in the doorway. Jones, mystified by the strain in her voice, looked inquiringly at the other two.

"Probably," Needham answered. "But the last time I heard anything of it there were no surface mines. The Germans have been getting by all right by keeping up."

He did not add that the British had been moving heaven and earth to make up the deficiency, had already announced to the Allies that part of the channel was now barred above as well as below.

"Have you two planned anything?" she asked, after looking back over her shoulder to make sure that she was not being watched. Her care was unnecessary, for at the moment the Germans were too concerned about the mine field to waste a thought on the prisoners.

"If you all are willing, the next time all hands go up on the topside we will make a break for it. All I will need is five minutes in the radio room."

"To report this code?" Alice asked. "Will the English accept it? How will they know——"

"They may not," Needham replied hurriedly. "But I think I have doped it out.

Anyhow, it's a chance . . . Now if it works, what then?"

"You give me the five minutes in the engine room, sir, and I'll see that she won't be able to travel," Lentz volunteered.

"Good!" Needham exclaimed. "Now here . . . "

Rapidly he told each of the men what he was to do. They listened with growing enthusiasm.

But Alice began to show signs of mutiny as it became clear that Needham intended that she keep out of it. As soon as he paused, she broke in with a smile.

"And I am to sit in my room and knit? Or should I hold my hands over my ears and scream in approved movie style?"

"You will stay in your room, ma'am," Lentz insisted.

"If this goes better than we expect—if we have more time," Needham went on hurriedly to forestall further objections, "we will try to get those sheets that Miss Langley saw."

"They are in Wedel's safe," she volunteered. "But if you think——"

The entrance of two of the crew interrupted her protests, and she hastily retreated toward her room.

"She don't act like she was going to hide out when the row starts, sir," Lentz muttered, looking after her admiringly.

The Germans were coming below by twos and threes. Needham stirred impatiently; and, as the compartment filled with men, he looked longingly toward the door of the radio room. But they could do nothing now. He rolled over and closed his eyes.

CHAPTER IV

PRISON OR——

IN THE soft light of early morning the submarine moved along close under the Belgian coast. Through rifts in the thin mist that drifted low on the water, the mass of the land was visible, lying like a cloud on the sea. She rolled heavily, already feeling the ground swell, a welcome evidence of the nearness of a friendly coast.

The men were in high spirits. They laughed constantly, their carefree manner contrasting strikingly with their anxious bearing during the previous night. Around the open hatches and against the conning tower more than half of the crew lounged at ease, smoking comfortably and exchanging plans for their approaching liberty. They were already assuming the airs of veterans of the U-boat service, picturing themselves swaggering among the beer gardens, accepting the homage of worshipping and not too discerning civilians.

They frequently scanned the misty expanse of water ahead. The word had gone around that a division of destroyers was coming out from the base for a raid toward Dover. It was a relief to look forward to sighting a friendly vessel after all the anxious days that lay behind them. And, for the new men, a first opportunity to pose as veterans.

Presently the lookout on the bridge straightened up, then turned and reported something to Von Poleski. A dim shape appeared on the port bow. As they watched, another and another followed, until there were six, high bowed destroyers bearing down out of the mist. A signalman climbed up on the low rail, perched precariously and waved his bits of bunting. More men swarmed up from below to watch eagerly as the surface craft changed course to pass the submarine close aboard. Here at last was tangible evidence of security. A ripple of cheers ran among the men, was faintly echoed from the leading destroyer, where they could see men leisurely completing the last minute preparations for sea, laying lifelines down on deck clear of the guns, rigging splinter mats and filling the deck ammunition racks.

As the leading destroyer drew abeam, Von Poleski stiffened and saluted with a flourish, conscious of this, his first appearance as commanding officer. The incident gave a pleasant flavor to his thoughts; a flavor that was strengthened by the heartening proximity of the coast. For the first time since the wounding of Wedel, he felt comfortably secure; and with relief from responsibility in sight, he swelled with pride. And here was an excellent opportunity for an uninterrupted chat with the good looking prisoner. He had found little time to enjoy her so far.

He glanced around and noticed with satisfaction that almost all the crew were on deck. Three men in the engine room, the radio operator closed up in his room, a quartermaster stationed inside the conning tower at the upper control; all clear of the battery compartment. Looking through the open hatch, he saw the quartermaster step across under it. The man wore no jumper, was out of uniform. In spite of his preoccupation Von Poleski bristled angrily. Carelessness about the crew's uniform was one of the failings that he had most objected to in Wedel. He called the man and ordered him below to get into uniform. His pleasure could wait, he told himself virtuously. Duty came first.

At the sound of cheering on deck, Needham, in the act of unlocking his irons, stopped short and gazed apprehensively at the others. The horrible suspicion that they had waited too long, that the boat was already making port, flashed through his mind. Aft, he saw the few men who remained below drop their work and swarm up the ladders.

Then he relaxed as a more probable explanation occurred to him. Of course! The boat was passing an outward bound submarine or some outlying German patrol craft.

"Probably another sub," he explained to the others, who looked at him inquiringly. "And this looks like our chance."

Apparently the boat's interior was deserted forward of the engine room. The sound of feet scuffling on deck, and occasional scraps of excited talk from the men above, testified to their absorption.

A MOMENT later the three men stood up and stretched themselves. It was good to be free again, to cast off the deadening monotony of passive inaction. Obtaining arms was their first problem. Needham advanced cautiously and surveyed the battery compartment for a small arms rack; but, as he had expected, he saw none. They turned to the tool rack behind the torpedo bench and selected heavy, twelve-inch wrenches; formidable weapons in a free-for-all fight. Lentz waved his tentatively, with a grin of satisfaction, as they stepped silently into the deserted battery compartment.

Just over their heads the forward escape hatch stood open, held up by its spring hinge. While the other two moved aft, Jones stationed himself at the tripping switch, carefully keeping back out of sight from above. The moment that Needham entered the radio room, he was to trip the hatch and run to the control room. Lentz would make for the engine room, tripping the after hatch as he passed, and secure the engineers. How many men he would find there, they could only guess. At best, two or three; at the worst, twice that number.

But the little chief was confident that he could at least hold them in the engine room for long enough to permit Needham to send off his message. The latter, knowing Lentz, had little fear about that point. Jones was to close the conning tower hatch if he could. As that necessitated climbing up into the upper control, they could not count on success there. But, failing to do that, he was to do his best to delay the inevitable onslaught from above. Lentz would do his best to dispose of the engine room force and come to his support. As he rapidly reviewed the plan, Needham grimly admitted that the chance of success was small.

Lentz boldly moved aft, paused in the doorway to assure himself that the control room was empty, and hurried on.

The door of the radio room was closed. While he paused to give Lentz time to get aft, Needham heard the buzz of the sending set. He nodded to Jones and seized the knob. Behind him the escape hatch clanged shut and Jones dashed by into the control room.

"Potzteufel! Diese verdamnte Amerikaner!" The startled yell rang through the empty hull.

Whirling, Needham jumped into the control room. Jones was grappling with a German. Above, he saw other figures peering down the upper hatch.

"I'm comin', Jonesy! Give 'em hell!" Lentz shouted from the engine room.

Ignoring the two struggling men, Needham flung himself at the short ladder, swung up into the small chamber above. There was no time to think, no time to weigh chances. In another minute the Germans would be down and all chance of seizing the radio room would be lost.

Already there were two men crowding down the upper ladder; others were peering down the hatchway. The first saw Needham, let go and dropped. Needham was halfway through the hatch. He rolled aside and struck upward with the wrench. The man went down with a groan as the weapon crashed into his shin bone, and Needham had time to gain his feet before the next was upon him.

There was little room for movement in the small compartment, obstructed as it was by the hatchway in the deck and the fittings about the steering wheel in the forward part. The short iron ladder leading down from the top of the conning tower afforded footing for only two men at a time; and, of these, the lower was exposed to the swing of Needham's wrench.

As he got up a heavily booted foot caught him on the side of the head. He sprawled across the first man, came up against the steel bulkhead and charged in again, bent upon clearing the place before he could be overwhelmed by numbers. The man on deck grabbed at his legs but missed. Another, already down the ladder, jumped at him. The wrench beat down the upraised arms, and the man dropped without a sound. A hand clawed Needham's face; the man on deck had his leg now. He struck down blindly without taking his eyes from the next assailant.

He forgot the radio room, forgot Jones and Lentz. Battered, gasping for breath in the close air, he fought in grim silence, clinging to the one idea that if he managed to clear the ladder he could get the hatch closed. The tripping button was just out of reach beside the ladder. Above, the Germans, scarcely realizing what was going on, were jammed in the hatch; but another managed to get through. Needham still clutched the wrench, his one advantage over the others. Blows that were largely ineffectual, because of the confined space, battered at his face and body. Hardly knowing how many men confronted him, he struck out at faces that floated in the air about him. Men went down, clawed at him from below; but somehow he managed to keep his footing. Time and again he ripped free and made for the tripping switch, only to be caught in a new onslaught.

Half blinded by blood from the reopened wound in his head, it seemed to him that the whole crew of the submarine swarmed in that tiny room. He went to his knees under a blow on the head. Before the second blow could fall, another German stumbled in front of him. He got up once more and a big quartermaster struck him from behind, ramming him against the bulkhead. The wrench slipped from his fingers and clattered on the steel deck.

AGAIN he burst away, caught a fleeting glimpse of his surroundings. He was astonished to see only two men down. The struggle seemed endless. His arms were heavy from the blows they had struck. Over his assailants' shoulder, he saw one other man. A third was coming down the ladder. As he dodged and struck out with his fist, he caught a glimpse of the third man's face. It was Von Poleski. He charged in with redoubled fury, determined to reach the German officer before they downed him, the round, good-humored face of the mate cropping up in his mind.

"Hold hard, sir!"

Lentz came scrambling up from below, his battered face gleaming with the joy of battle. Needham and his two assailants rolled in a heap against the steering wheel. Von Poleski sprang at Lentz, meaning to crush the smaller man by sheer weight. But the chief bent double and rammed his head into the officer's stomach, sending him back across the prostrate men, gasping for breath, the fight momentarily knocked out of him.

Without a second glance at the officer, Lentz jumped to aid Needham. The first man, he clipped neatly behind the ear before the Germans could turn to meet the new attack, and the man turned from Needham just in time to go down before another blow to the jaw. The other man covered his head with his arms before Lentz could get in a blow, but instantly forgot Needham in the effort to beat off the little chief's furious onslaught.

Needham slowly got to his feet, his head buzzing, for the moment unable to collect his scattered faculties. As he looked about him uncertainly, he saw a man rise on the other side of the compartment and recognized Von Poleski, brandishing the wrench. Another man was coming down the ladder. Von Poleski came on, grinning confidently at the staggering man who faced him. As Needham dodged the first swing, he heard the sharp spat of a fist from behind him and something like a grunt of triumph from Lentz.

With his eyes on Von Poleski's uplifted right arm, Needham backed away, trying to draw Von Poleski away from the switch.

But the ruse failed and he advanced again. He managed to parry the next blow with his left arm. Von Poleski faltered, temporarily thrown off his balance, but still confident. The effort made Needham realize how little strength he had left. Gasping for breath, with hardly enough strength to raise his arms, he saw that the fight was almost over for him. And the temporary advantage of Lentz's arrival was rapidly being lost.

Desperation and overpowering anger swept over him at the thought of Von Poleski's triumph. As the German hesitated, he saw his chance and threw himself headlong at him, seizing the raised right arm and mustering all of his remaining strength to bend it backward, force the weapon from the fingers. Von Poleski rained blows in the American's face with his free hand; then closed his fingers on the other's throat. But Needham clung grimly and felt the grip relaxing. With every atom of will in him he held to his determination to secure the weapon. It came free abruptly as he felt his strength slipping away. He had a confused impression of trying to pull Von Poleski's hands away from his throat while he struck with one hand. Behind the German he saw the switch within reach. Then he felt himself falling.

Crouching on hands and knees, for the moment unable to get up, Needham stared around. The compartment had grown strangely dark. For a moment he tried to understand; then, as his head cleared, he saw Lentz standing alone by the ladder. Looking upward, it dawned upon him that the hatch was closed, that they had beaten off the Germans.

"Cleaned — 'em — sir," Lentz panted. "Some roughhouse!" Then, as he saw Needham staring down at Von Poleski's crumpled body he added: "That bird's done. You ruin't him with that Stillson."

His face darkened as he glanced down through the hatch, and Needham, remembering the others, looked up in alarm.

"But we lost out below, sir."

"How? What?" Needham gasped.

"The radio stunt's out. The Old Man —he come to again and wrecked it while Miss Langley was holdin' up the radio man."

"Holding up?"

"She got a gun somewheres . . . Jones is knocked out . . . She held 'em off so I could come up here."

So Wedel, then, had won after all! Needham leaned wearily against the ladder, a picture of exhaustion and despair. His eyes mechanically noted the details of the place. Temporarily, then, they controlled the situation; until the Germans on deck thought of opening a torpedo hatch or forced one of the others. Wondering what they were doing, he stepped over to one of the small eye-ports.

Fog hung low over a smooth, gray sea. Off the starboard bow he saw a number of fishing boats, so close that he could see their men staring curiously at the submarine. Beyond he caught a glimpse of land.

Shallow water! The possibility that the nearness of land suggested drove away all feeling of exhaustion. His eyes rapidly swept the limited sector of visibility. A hint of solidity in the fog caught his attention. Then the broad back of one of the men outside cut off his view. To one side he saw another man waving his arms, realized that the man was trying to signal. The first man moved aside, and, there, against the vague background of mist, a column of destroyers were driving toward the submarine, flinging up great sheets of spray. German destroyers, he saw instantly.

But, as he turned away from the port, his spirits rose to the challenge. There were five bodies in the compartment. Three, he saw, were moving feebly.

"Lash these three up. Fast!" Needham exclaimed to Lentz. "Then come below!"

He swung through the hatch hastily.

GLANCING hurriedly about, he saw Alice Langley holding a pistol on Wedel and three other men. The German officer was leaning weakly against the bulkhead, but his eyes were gleaming with triumph. Jones was sitting on deck staring around him uncertainly.

"Here!" he called sharply to Alice, wasting no time on a greeting. "Lentz is tying up three of them above there. Stand here where you can see the hatch, too. They might work free."

He was already scanning the faces of the gauges, unable to read the German labels but recognizing them from their position. Before his rapid survey was completed, Lentz scrambled down.

"All right, Lentz. Give me a hand here! We're going to dive!"

There was no time for further explanation. Already they could all hear the beat of approaching propellers.

"Aye, aye, sir," Lentz acknowledged, as if that was the most ordinary command in the world.

The Germans paled as they saw the two Americans lay hands on the valves. Jones got to his feet and was instantly commandeered by Needham. At a nod, Lentz twirled a valve. The deck wavered underfoot, its angle changing slowly. The others swayed on their feet as the bow sank, watched wide eyed as Lentz and Needham jumped from one side of the compartment to the other. The beat of feet on deck above was suddenly stilled. A murmur that might have been the report of a gun reached their ears faintly.

The depth gauge crept slowly around. Five meters. Ten meters. Needham's eyes were fixed on it now. Fifteen! Water dripped down from above; grew into a small cascade as the racked plates gave under the pressure. The bow suddenly appeared to stop going down as the stern sank with ominous speed. The after tanks, too rapidly flooded, were taking charge. Even Lentz paled as he looked inquiringly at Needham.

"Took a chance on shallow water," the latter explained. "Some of their torpedo boats coming at us. Think we are on soundings." He spoke without taking his eyes from the depth gauge.

Lentz's fingers tightened slightly on the valve and he snatched a glance at the water that came down in growing volume.

"How much will she stand?" He wondered grimly. "Ten, twelve fathoms, maybe. That's twenty or twenty-five of these meters."

Eighteen meters. The water was pouring down now, running about their feet in a rippling sheet. The hum of propellers above grew louder.

Twenty meters. The stern, down now at an angle of twenty degrees or more, wavered slightly, came to rest with a slight, grating sound. The bow settled, bumped softly and lay still. Needham wiped his wet face and Lentz sighed audibly. She had grounded. For the moment the incoming water was forgotten in their relief at the knowledge that the limit of pressure was reached.

Then Needham moved over to examine the stream that trickled down from above. He glanced down at the film of water on deck. It was deeper against the forward bulkhead; the bow was slightly lower. He closed the watertight door leading into the forward battery compartment.

"The propellers," Alice Langley's voice broke the silence. "They have stopped!"

"Stopped to pick up these people," Needham explained. They listened intently. "They'll all be waiting up there for us." He looked speculatively at Jones who was still shaky from the kick in the stomach that had knocked him out. "We may fool 'em yet. Three of us—might do it——"

"Four!" Alice corrected. "Count me in, if you will relieve me of this cannon. Can't you tie up these men?"

"Secure the prisoners," Needham directed, taking the pistol and motioning the men off.

As he saw Wedel he stopped.

"I'd rather not tie you, sir," he said. "If you will give us your word not to interfere."

But the German shook his head silently. He had faced the common end of them all without a sign of emotion; but, now, the sight of Needham's familiarity with submarines for the first time reared the specter of captivity and the loss of his boat to the enemy.

TEN minutes later the seven Germans were safely bound and secured in the after battery compartment. Lentz and Needham were aft in the engine room, studying the engines. For Lentz, with his knowledge of German, it was easy to make out the functions of the various switches and valves. Aided by Needham, he soon worked out the steps necessary to start the motors, and was appointed chief engineer forthwith. Needham, with the other two, undertook to man the control.

For an hour they worked, going over each step, checking each operation with the water rising about their ankles, counting the minutes until it would rise over the sill of the door and threaten the after batteries.

Then they heard propellers again. The sound instantly rose to the hum of full speed. Behind it they made out others, farther off but growing louder. The boats above seemed to be drawing away; the distant ones coming nearer.

Needham had no time to worry over whether it was a contact between hostile craft or a ruse to bring them up. The water was already within two or three inches of the sill. They could chance the depth charges of the destroyers or their guns; the threat of rising water was a certainty.

Breathless, and scarcely daring to look at each other, they took their stations and tried the motors. They whirred softly into action. Needham opened an air valve, the hull swayed and lifted slowly as if reluctant to leave the mud. The depth gauge flickered tentatively, moved over to nineteen meters. More air hissed through unseen lines. She was definitely rising now.

"Cut in the motors," Needham called back to Lentz.

As the boat swayed forward they all breathed more freely.

Needham raised the periscope and waited for the first glimpse of the surface. The others watched him almost carelessly, now that they felt the boat rising. A moment later he glanced around at them.

"Destroyers—British destroyers, heading away. Chasing the Germans." He made no effort to conceal his relief. Turning back to the glass he swung it slowly, scanning the sea. "And more luck! There's a fog bank to the westward rolling in fast."

"What does that mean?" Alice asked.

"A fair chance that we'll be able to elude the attentions of our friends, the British," Needham answered with a grin, as he glanced down to note the compass heading. "Come left, Jones. Put her on two, four, O. We can handle this bucket in surface trim. And may make port with her, if the British believe the white flag I'm going to fly and don't sink us off hand."

Through the long day, the *U-161* crept along, completely enshrouded in fog. From the German charts they managed to get an approximate idea of their position, and headed for the mouth of the Thames, praying that when they did encounter another ship there would be time to declare their identity.

CHAPTER V

PRIZE CREW

LATE that evening, a queer procession approached the division of American submarines that was moored alongside its tender in the Downs. First came a squat trawler, her whistle squawking excitedly. At the end of a towline astern followed an unmistakably German submarine, with an English destroyer bringing up the rear. And from the submarine's stub mast drooped the American colors. As the trawler took it alongside and edged in toward the American boats, the destroyer sheered off, its crew manning the side and cheering lustily.

The Americans tumbled up on deck and stared in amazement. A U-boat, hardly damaged and flying American colors! And with a woman on her deck!

A little man appeared from behind the gun, coiling a heaving line.

"Hey, you flatfeet, take this line!"

The crowd murmured angrily, stared at the supposed German. But a grizzled old chief gunner's mate started at the sound of the voice, peered intently at the speaker and suddenly jumped across to the other boat's deck.

"Stub Lentz!" he shouted, as he pounded the little man's back. "What the hell!"

"Hello, Spud." Lentz appeared to be very busy with the mooring lines, but his eyes were sparkling. "Got a chew?"

"Where'd you drop from? What you got here?" The other man offered his plug without taking his eyes from Lentz.

"Well," Lentz muttered around the corners of the plug. "Me 'n' the Old Man was after a billet over here, so we brung along somethin' to trade with."

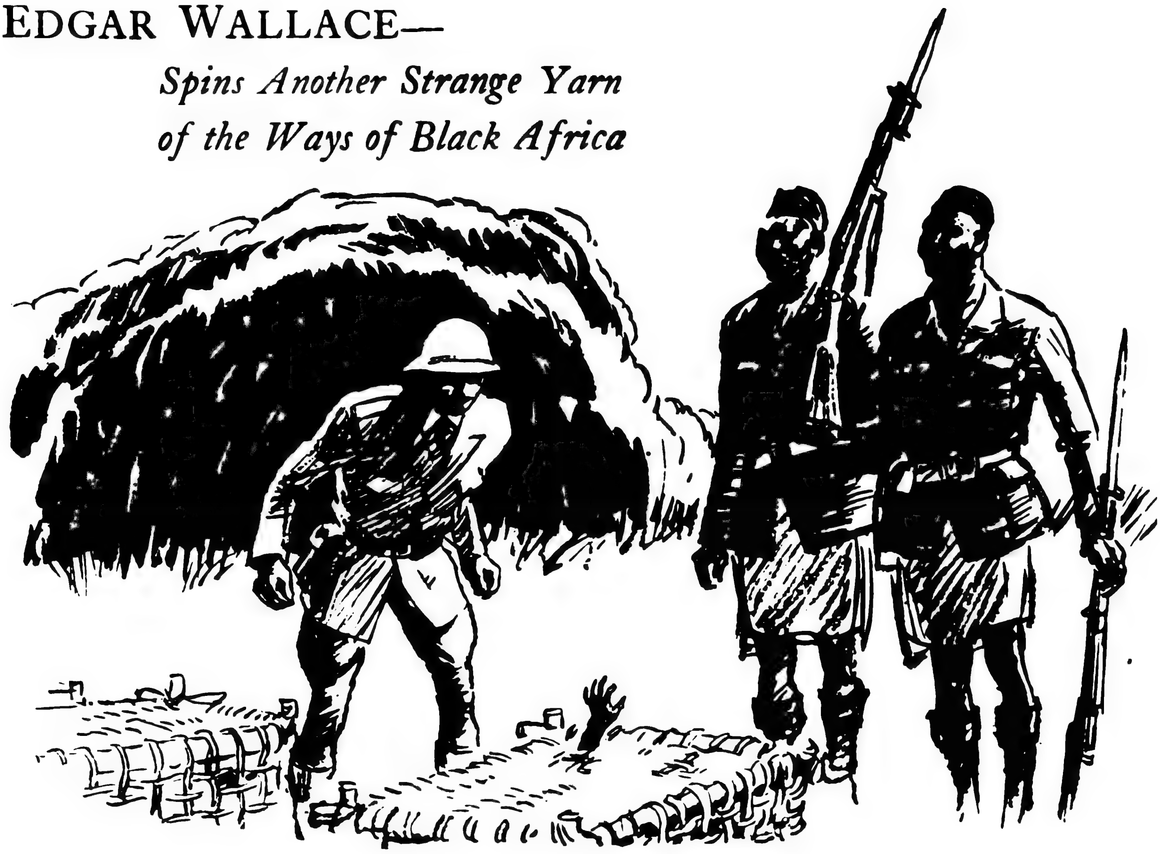
He returned the remnant of the plug and raised his hand to check off the items on his fingers.

"An' we got seven Jerries; one set of these here secret codes; one U-boat complete with fittin's an' spare parts—" He paused and stared speculatively up at the two heads that were just visible above the top of the conning tower. Even in the failing light he could see that they were very close together.

"An' looks to me like we got a new commodore, too."

EDGAR WALLACE—

Spins Another Strange Yarn of the Ways of Black Africa



IN THE MANNER OF LIPSTICK

IT WAS one of those glorious days at Headquarters which occur in the spring of the year. A fresh, cool breeze blew in from the sea, swaying the fronds of the palms and raising lazy swirls of dust at hut corners.

Mr. Tibbetts stood before a small body of noncommissioned officers, a book in his hand, his monocle screwed into his left eye. From the fact that he wore his Sam Browne and that a leather-scabbarded sword hung at his left hip, it could be inferred that he was engaged in official duties.

Sanders, standing by the rail of the residency stoop, asked a question.

"A lecture," said Hamilton grimly. "They don't know what he's driving at, and I'll bet he doesn't either. So they're all square."

Bones was lecturing on the subject of field engineering.

"About which there is no man who knows less," said Hamilton with a certain gloomy satisfaction.

He watched the party dismiss and saw Bones go off to his hut to put away his sword and belt. One of the lectured had to pass the residency, and him Hamilton beckoned.

"O tell me, corporal man," he said, "what wonder did the lord Tibbetti tell you?"

The corporal grinned uneasily and shuffled his bare feet in his embarrassment.

"Lord," he said at last, "he spoke of a great canal that was dug in this land, so big that ships could pass from one world to another. But this we knew was a jest, so we did not take notice of it."

Hamilton nodded.

"Also?" he asked.

The corporal's black and shiny face beamed.

"Lord, he spoke of certain holes in the ground into which we Houssas could go so that our enemies could not shoot us. But when Seargent Mahmet Ibn Hassan asked how could we dig holes in the Eburi country, where every spade raises water, my lord Tibbetti said rude words to the sergeant. So that we knew he was jesting also."

When the man had gone, Hamilton lit a cheroot.

"Suez Canal! How the devil does he bring that into the ambit of military engineering?"

Bones hove in sight at that moment. He had a book and several papers under his arm. His face was rather grave.

"Lecture dismissed, sir."

He saluted, dropped his papers and book and spent a little time chasing one of the former; the sea breeze had freshened.

"What has the Suez Canal got to do with it?"

Bones shrugged his shoulders.

"Dear old officer, that, I admit, comes into the category of tactics and strategy. Tomorrow we trot out jolly old strains an' stresses."

Hamilton glanced at the book. It was not, as he had expected, a post correspondence volume, but one issued by the War Office.

"Yes, dear old commander, I'm perfectly serious. It started when I was readin' about dear old Lipstick. I was sort of fired——"

"Dear old who?" demanded Sanders.

"Lipstick, excellency an' sir. The jolly old boy who built the Suez Canal——"

"Lesseps," snarled Hamilton. "Gosh! Why can't you get a name right?"

"Names are nothing, dear old Ham," chided Bones gently. "Good old Lipstick's name lives in his jolly old canal. *Circumspice docet,* dear old boy: Look around this canal and that's my memorial, dear old Ham."

Later that day came a deputation from the Akasava folk, who live to the westward of the Eburi, and they came with a grievance. Their spokesman, a tousled old man, spoke boldly and despairingly by turns. His name was K'saga, he was a notorious thief and ruled a village of outcasts. There were a score of these communities up and down the river, peopled by men and women who had fled from the justice of their outraged fellows.

K'saga had to tell a tale of stolen goats and stolen women—but the goats were rather important. And the culprits were, of course, the Eburi.

When he had finished, Sanders spoke:

"O K'saga, I do not know which is worse, the Eburi people or you and your village. Now I tell you again to gather your people and I will take them to a cleaner land where none can rob them, and I will pass my hand over them and wipe clean their evil deeds, so that no man who has lost a wife and none who desires to avenge a brother shall do harm to you."

But K'saga rejected the suggestion. He himself had the blood of two cousins on his hands and preferred the miserable village which he lorded to the finest city where he would sleep badly and start at every sound.

"Lord, these Eburi people are devils now, saying evil things about your lordship. What will it be when their old chief dies and a woman rules them?"

"That is with me," said Sanders briefly, and dismissed the palaver with promises of investigation.

Though he was not aware of the fact, the old chief of the Eburi was already with his fathers, and a woman sat on the stool of kingship. Sanders learned this fact on his way upriver.

THERE was no part of his territories that he approached with greater circumspection than the Eburi. Up and down the river they were called by various names. To the rest of the Akasava folk they were "the Unreachables"; to the N'gombi "the Proud Faced," which may be translated as insolent. They paid taxation as and when they wished; they came and stayed away from tribal palavers at their own sweet will. They raided and stole, moving across their marshes with an ease which led to the legend—still persisting in certain works of ethnology—that they were web footed.

How much of K'saga's story was true he must discover for himself. Rumors had come to him that the outcasts were "chopping" women—cannibalism was the most difficult of all crimes to suppress. And complaints that women had been stolen might well mean that K'saga and his hideous cabal were preparing alibis in advance.

Here he was not far wrong, for the new queen of the Eburi was too interested in her position to bother about her miserable neighbor.

When the woman I'safi-M'lo'bini knew

that she was to be chief of the Eburi, she celebrated the unique occasion by adopting the Christian religion, and was received into the Roman church by a sceptical priest, who gave her the name of Theresa. He was sceptical because he knew his Theresa rather well, and that his doubts were justified was proved when, following her conversion, she held a great dance in honor of the moon and caused her late father's seven wives to be whipped.

Father Martin, a bearded man who wore the habit of a Franciscan and a solar topee, came aboard the *Zaire* to take tea with the commissioner. Over a pipe he expressed his opinions; which were mainly uncomplimentary to Theresa.

"I could have wished that the Baptists had her," he said gloomily. "She's missionary trained, speaks English—which is a diabolical accomplishment in a native—she can even play the harmonium. But she's mischief from the top of her woolly head to the soles of her big feet. When I found her using a picture of Our Lady to cure one of her dancing boys of bellyache, I nearly took a stick to her!"

Sanders was mildly amused. How Theresa came to be the one woman chief in his territory is simply explained. The Eburi folk were rabidly strong for tradition. Failing the succession of the eldest son, for the chieftainship was in every sense dynastic, the seventh daughter of the seventh son was invariably elected. For a hundred and five years the eldest sons had followed one another in succession. Theresa was the first woman chief that the Eburi had had since the year 1817.

"She'll settle down," he said, but as an act of precaution sent for the new chief.

Between the Eburi and the river is a march of twenty-seven miles, mostly through swamp, and it was not a journey lightly to be undertaken. He waited a week and then the answer came from the mouth of her councilor.

"Lord, the woman, our chief, is sick and cannot come," he said.

Sanders read defiance in the message, but he was patient. Theresa must reveal herself before he took stronger action. And he was particularly anxious to avoid trouble.

From the river the ground rises gradually, until in the Eburi the woods stand nearly five hundred feet above the river level. In the circumstances, it was surprising that the twenty mile belt of marsh existed. But a rough survey revealed the cause. There was a sloping stratum of clay beneath the soggy ground. Evidence of this was supplied by the high clay cliffs that overshadow the river near Chumbiri; and it was under these cliffs that Sanders had anchored the *Zaire* while he waited for the answer to his summons.

The marsh had a military value: it was wholly impossible to approach the Eburi on its most accessible side. And it had no other; for to left and right of the "corridor" which led into the interior were the frontiers of the French possessions. In shape, the Eburi land may be likened to a squat, wide necked flask; the very word Eburi means "gourd." Near where the corridor approached the river was a saucer shaped depression of land in which dwelt K'saga and his people, and him Sanders visited.

Once before he had had occasion to take an armed force into the country, and he never forgot the nightmare month he spent mostly ankle deep in water. Here dwelt water snakes and huge leeches and a family of crocodiles, the founders of which at some remote period must have traveled overland to this swampy paradise. There were certain paths, more or less intermittent, that connected the area with the outer world, but only at certain seasons of the year were they practicable. The officer commanding troops, who made a visit of inspection, expressed the opinion that the country was almost impregnable.

IT WAS a dirty village, clumsily and lazily built. No two huts were in line; the gardens, where corn grew, straggled into the unreclaimed waste. Men vanished at the sight of the dapper, white clad figure, and even K'saga seemed to have an accusing conscience, for he was trembling when Sanders approached him.

The commissioner made a tour of the village, looking for certain signs of guilt; incidentally choosing a tree on which he would hang K'saga if he found evidence of cannibalism. There was no proof, however. He went back to his ship and arrived in time to receive Theresa's second message.

It was decidedly insolent and embodied a demand for "a great present." It was the first direct act of defiance which the Eburi people had delivered for close on twenty years. Sanders was not angry.

"Go back to the woman," he said, "and say that Sandi sends her this beautiful present that she may see every day the face of one who will answer for all that happens in this land."

He handed the messenger a gaudily framed mirror and went down the river, a very thoughtful man.

He had hardly arrived at Headquarters when he summoned what was practically a council of war.

"This woman is going to give trouble. I've had information that she intends to reestablish the old sacrifices. That, I will not stomach even if it costs me an expeditionary force. The only chance is that I can overawe her, and I purpose sending Bones in the *Wiggle,* with twenty men and a couple of machine guns, to establish a post on the edge of the marsh. There is a good camping ground near the clay bluff; also you can keep your eye on K'saga, who I am certain is chopping women. I've half a mind to send to Headquarters for an engineer to make a survey of that section——"

"Dear old excellency," murmured Bones, hurt. "Headquarters—jolly old engineer . . . Really, really!"

He rolled his head, a picture of injured pride.

"Leave it to Bones," said Hamilton. "He'll cut a Suez Canal through to Tanganyika before you can say 'knife'."

"Dear old Ham," said Bones testily, "why jest, old boy? I don't profess to be a Lipstick—"

"Lesseps," wailed Hamilton.

"I don't even profess to be dear old thingamajig who built the Pyramids. But a simple surveying job . . ." He was amused at the fatuity of asking for outside help.

"You might try to establish contact with Theresa, and if you can, take a couple of men to the village. From what I've heard, she's as ugly as sin and as vain as the devil."

"A typical woman," murmured Bones, and Hamilton restrained himself with great difficulty. "Naughty, naughty! Put down the salt cellar, dear old Ham," said Bones reproachfully. "Jolly old excellency and I understand each other quite. What you wish me to do, dear sir and administrator, is to say a few words to this uppish young damsel. I'll talk to her like a father——"

"She'll probably talk to you like a wife," said Hamilton.

He spoke with the voice of prophecy. A day or two afterwards came a canoe, paddled by Eburi warriors, and with them came the courier of Theresa. He made a long speech about nothing, a longer speech about the looking-glass, and wound up: ". . . Lord, the chief of our people is a very wise woman and she knows all things. Now you have two sons, and one of these she will marry——"

Sanders was on his feet. The courier cowed under the blazing blue of his eyes.

"Go back to the chief of the Eburi and say I have nothing here that she may wed, only a rope that has hanged many chiefs but has never hanged a woman. Also I have many soldiers with guns which say *'ha, ha,'* and sharp steel knives. And if I come to her I will make an end of her and her people. The palaver is finished."

The courier had the appearance of one who was rather glad to make his escape.

Bones went away in the *Wiggle* with what dignity he could summon; for Hamilton had brought a gramophone down to the quay, and as the *Wiggle* started upriver the strains of the "Wedding March" came scrappily to his attentive ears. There was nothing but silence left for him—after all, he had grown hoarse from roaring "cad!" through a megaphone. Moreover, it had had very little effect upon his skittish superior.

BONES came to the clay bluff, marked out his camp, and sent a peremptory order to K'saga to come and bring with him every able bodied man of his village. About a hundred responded, old and young, and with the help of these he placed the little camp in a condition of defense; made a rough sort of harbor for the protection of the motor launch, and mounted his machine guns at strategical points, covering the hard road which presently lost itself in the marshes.

K'saga's men grumbled and worked. At the end of the first day Bones counted heads and found that at least half of the men had sneaked back to their village. He took six Houssas into K'saga's stronghold, hauled out the two headmen responsible for the recruiting of labor and flogged them. The next morning the full complement came and stayed till the end of the day.

He had been four or five days established when K'saga came to him with a story of a woman who had been stolen by the Eburi while she was in the forest gathering wood. Bones listened to the circumstantial story without interruption. When K'saga had finished he said:

"Find this woman and bring her to my camp. And she shall be alive, K'saga, or you will be dead at the breaking of the day."

At midnight they came to him, bringing the woman with them, alive and well; a terrified creature, too frightened to answer questions. Bones beckoned the chief aside.

"Take her back to your village, and if she disappears you also disappear," he said.

Evidently the appearance of an armed force on the edge of the marsh had impressed the new chieftain of the Eburi. She sent a messenger to guide Bones to her village, but added a significant rider:

"Because it is a great danger, the woman says bring no soldiers, lest they be lost in the marshes."

But Bones bargained for two, and apparently this compromise had been already arranged.

He left at dawn, camped in the forest, sleeping in the fork of a tree, and came to the village in the middle of a scorching day, when men found it hard to work, though the women were lively enough, for they were preparing food for the great festival of M'shimba-M'shamba.

Now, in the bad old days before the law came to the river, the feast of M'shimba-M'shamba was not a nice observance. There were human sacrifices, and the three poles slung in the middle of the village street in triangular form looked rather ominous to Mr. Tibbetts, who had seen several similar tokens of sacrifice.

The attitude of the people was not unfriendly but rather familiar. They had been so long dissociated from symbols of authority that they were more in awe of the two Houssas, with their loaded rifles and fixed bayonets, than they were of Bones.

There came a councilor to him, a tall stripling, newly recruited from Theresa's dancing boys.

"Tell me, O man, why are these sticks of wood put here?" Bones asked.

The councilor answered without hesitation.

"In a day and a day the rime of the moon will come, and we do magic to M'shimba-M'shamba, as our fathers did."

"As your fathers did," repeated Bones gently. "O man, that is a strange saying; for your fathers did evil things. They chopped young girls, tied them to the stake and watched them burn."

The councilor showed his first sign of uneasiness.

"We of the Eburi are a great people," he began oratorically. "And what we do is right, for none can come up against us because of the water land."

Bones opened his mouth wide and scratched his nose, and when he did that he was thinking very quickly.

"What are you, man?" he asked.

"I am a councilor," said the youth proudly. "Also I am one of the chief woman's many husbands."

It was towards sunset when he was granted his interview. He found the queen sitting on her stool, and, grouped in a half circle about her, some twenty young men, each with colored feathers in his hair. Theresa was rather above middle height. Her face was disfigured with the marks which smallpox leaves; she was very skinny and scantily attired. She pointed to the space before her.

"Sit, white man," she said.

Bones stood, towering over her.

"I see you, I'safi-M'lo'bini," he said, and was shocked when she answered in English.

They brought a stool for Bones, and on this he condescended to sit, immediately opposite her; not a favorable position for one who was rather requiring in the matter of duty.

"Now, Tibbetti, you shall tell me stories of wonderful things," she said.

Bones had himself to blame that he had acquired up and down the river the reputation of official story-teller. He had wonderful powers of invention, and had the gift of utilizing the limited vocabulary of the Bomongo tongue to its fullest advantage.

"I'safi," he said, "I will tell you these stories; but first you shall tell me why these sticks stand before your hut." He pointed to the sacrificial poles.

Evidently she had the explanation prepared, for she talked glibly enough, and there was no word of sacrifice.

"That is a good story," said Bones politely when she had finished. "Now you shall tell me, woman chief, who are the three girls who are kept in little cages on the outskirts of your village?"

Here was a calamitous question. Theresa crossed herself ludicrously, and for a moment forgot her advantage and was almost humble.

"They will be released," said Bones sternly, "and there will be no killing palaver."

IT TOOK the greater part of twenty minutes to free the captives, and by that time Theresa had recovered some of her equanimity. Realizing that his grip of the situation was slipping away, Bones began his story. He could adopt the deep, sonorous tones of the Akasava people, and he told of M'shimba-M'shamba and the fiery lizard whose glance is death, and of the little ghosts who live in the forest, and the devils that come up out of the river and eat dogs; and as he narrated, he saw his breathless audience growing larger and larger with every minute, until he sat in a circle of staring eyes. He allowed his fancy to embroider and invent, and on the spot he created M'pita, the snake god, who lives underground and harms none.

"His skin is white, his eyes are red. Let any man or woman look upon those eyes, and if he is ugly he becomes beautiful; if he is small he grows to be a giant. If it is a woman, then she is so lovely that all the world kneels to her."

It is possible that Bones was instigated by the too obvious plainness of his hostess. It is certain that she listened with growing eagerness, her unshapely mouth opening wider and wider.

"Where is this wonderful juju, Tibbetti?" she asked huskily.

Bones waved his hand airily towards the distant river.

"And have you looked upon him, Tibbetti?"

It was on the tip of Bones' tongue to say that he had a daily conference with M'pita, but remembering the consequence, he modestly confessed he had not.

"But I have seen his trail, like the sheen of gold. Some day I will dig a deep hole and find it for you—if you will obey the laws your father Sandi desires."

Bones went back to his camp next morning, well satisfied with himself, and wrote a long and incoherent letter to Sanders. His position was not entirely free from danger. Natives have short memories, and the magic of M'pita might too soon dissolve.

A story came down that the M'shimba sacrifice had been made. The father of the dead girl escaped across the marsh to tell the story. Bones flew a pigeon to Headquarters, and he was waiting for the reply, pacing up and down in the wood, watching with a malignant eye the quaking marsh which separated Theresa from retribution, when there came to him the most brilliant idea of his career.

His *lokali* sent a message to the Eburi. The next morning came Theresa's messenger.

"Go to your mistress and tell her that I have found M'pita. Let her send me all the young men of her village, that I may show them where to dig."

That afternoon was one of feverish activity for Bones. He summoned K'saga and his workmen and made a rough calculation.

"Dig me a deep hole there," he said, and reluctantly they obeyed.

The next morning brought eager recruits to the work. By nightfall a deep channel had been cut through heavy clay, and on the following morning Theresa herself came to watch operations.

"We shall find the snake. I am following his trail," said Bones solemnly.

Working frantically, the men of the Eburi enlarged and extended what was by now something that resembled a railway cutting. They slipped and slithered through the wet clay; they cut down trees that impeded their progress; turned the channel to avoid the rocks; but never once did they see M'pita the snake, whose look brings beauty.

It was towards the close of that day that the watching Theresa made a discovery.

"O Tibbetti, you are making a new river!"

Already the men in the cutting were

working kneedeep in water. Bones leaned wearily against a clay bank and grinned feebly. He was on the point of collapse. All day he had been flying hither and thither with the restless energy of an ant. He had marked the progress of M'pita with sticks driven into the ground; he had produced from the *Wiggle* a theodolite; the functions of which he imperfectly understood, and he had abandoned this for a more rough and ready method.

"He carries a little red book which is full of magic," one of the youthful councilors reported.

BY SUNSET the waters from the marsh had piled waist high at the head of the cutting. With the aid of fires the work went on through the night.

K'saga took counsel with a familiar.

"It is dark and Tibbetti cannot see. Let all our people steal away to the village and sleep."

Bones did not notice the disappearance of the outcasts until he looked around for one of K'saga's men, certain doubts having arisen in his mind.

Two hours before dawn he blew up the last obstacle that separated his new river from the lower ground.

Theresa came to him in the early light of day and there was consternation in her face.

"Lord, my young men say that the water is running from my beautiful waterland, and that soon one will walk drily where the terrible mud would have swallowed them. And all this has happened because they dug up the earth seeking M'pita, the white snake."

Bones had his escort ready: sixteen men with loaded rifles, and two at each machine gun.

"Go back to your village, woman," he said. "Soon Sandi will come, walking freely where the waters were, and he will bring judgment."

He wrote a letter to headquarters and sent it by a fast canoe.

> *Sir and Exelency Excerlency,*
>
> *Vini Veritas Vide Vice! I have have found it! The serlution of mitilery militery dificulties in re Eburi. I have draned the bason! I have draind the basun! Vini vici etc. The whole of the marsh as per sch—sced—schudle in margin is slowly drayning itself to pieces! By cuting cutting a X section through the clay and carefuly studing the contoors contuours different heights of the land I succeded in finding an outlet for the waters. Pro boni publici!*

"Why this strange rush of Latin?" asked Sanders.

There could be only one explanation.

"Bones is under the impression that Lipstick was a Roman."

Sanders was studying a big scale map of the Eburi.

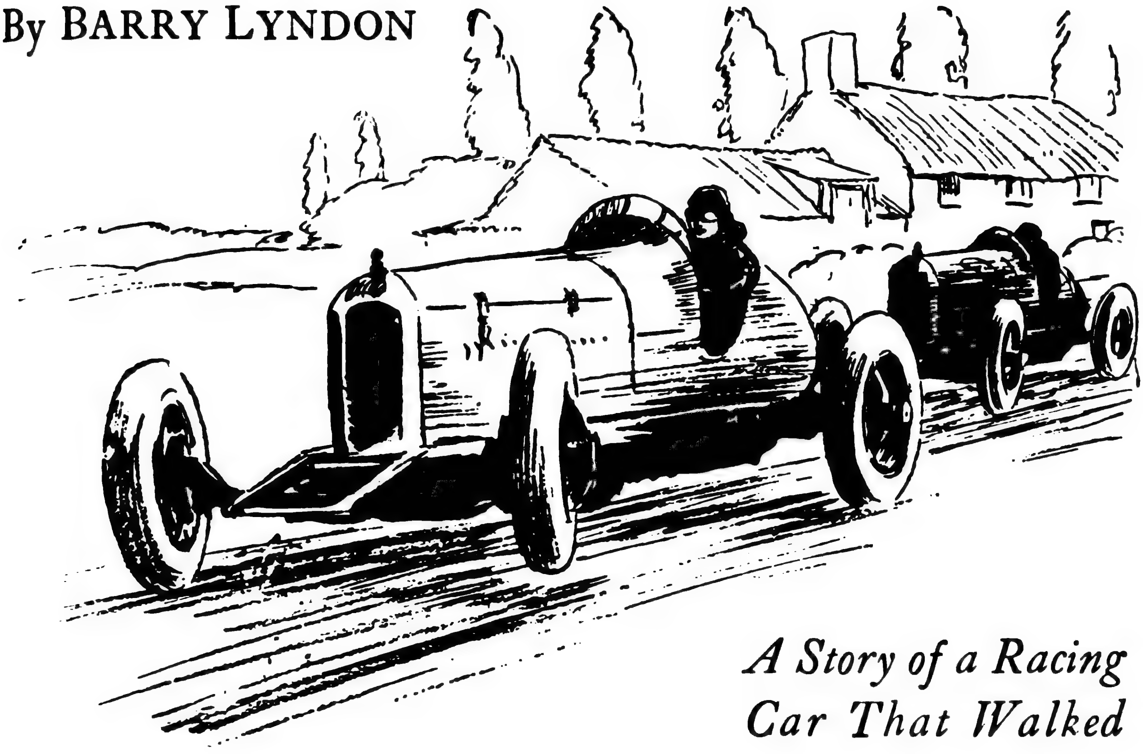
"A great idea of Bones'! A marvelous idea! I wonder where the dickens he got his labor?"

Hamilton was looking over his shoulder.

"Where the dickens does the water find its outlet?" he asked. "It couldn't run into the river direct."

K'saga could have supplied an answer were he alive, for where his unsavory village had been there had appeared a new lake, beneath whose placid surface was hidden much that were better hidden. And in this lake the crocodiles and water snakes that the draining marsh had left homeless were finding new lairs.

By BARRY LYNDON



A Story of a Racing Car That Walked

CALAMITY KATE

"I'M TELLING you that I've seen a car lift its wheels off the ground—and walk!" blazed Cliff Bellamy, and his hands shook as they rested on the narrow tail of his racing machine. His quivering, husky voice struck through the tense silence while he glared into the hard, set features of the man before him. "It was wheel tramp, and it killed her driver. If you've made these cars too light, that's what'll happen to us. And you know it!"

Hammond Knight's heavy eyelids drooped, half veiling their calculating expression as he glanced around the high roofed French barn. Evening sunlight slanted through the open doors, glimmering on the savagely powerful shapes of the three Knight machines which he had brought over to run in the morrow's Grand Prix d'Europe.

The sun glimmered on the narrow body shells, slung low between the dusty wheels, and on the thin wire which showed in spidery tracery over scuttle and tail, locking every nut.

Against the far wall, Jim Lee continued lagging cord around the thick grip of the hand brake lever on his own machine, working with exaggerated care and not daring to look up at the girl who leaned against the wire guard clamped over the staggered radiator. He could feel Marion's gaze on him, could sense her startled, unspoken questions. He mentally cursed the English driver for what he had just let slip.

Half a dozen yards away, old Dal Morgan had his head buried beneath the uplifted hood of the third machine, the click of his wrench sounding clearly through the quiet as he worked, apparently unheeding.

Marion Lawes was very slim and straight, with finely chiseled features and clear eyes. She had a square of silk in her hand, and over one arm drooped the three pairs of goggles which she was cleaning for Jim. She looked from his bent head to Dal Morgan's broad back, grizzled hair showing above the grimy collar of his overalls.

"You've got wheel tramp on the brain, Bellamy." Hammond Knight's voice was chill and emotionless, and Marion glanced at her uncle as he went on. "It can't possibly occur on my machines. But if you want to quit, say so, and I'll get somebody else to ride your car."

"You can't!" The lines on Cliff's sallow face deepened. "You know damned well that nobody else will take the Knight team into the race except we three poor fools. The machines are too dangerous."

"If you think that, why are you driving?" Knight's voice was still cold.

"Because I need the money," Cliff almost snarled. "So do Jimmy and Dal. That's why you picked us. You know that we'll drive your damned death traps until the wheels fall off, once we get into the race. There's an outside chance of one of us lasting long enough to take the winner's flag, and that's why you're paying high. But I've got a feeling that there'll be a dead Cliff Bellamy underneath a wrecked car about this time tomorrow, and I'm——"

"Shut up, Cliff!" Old Dal Morgan straightened beside his machine as he grunted the words.

"Shut up, eh?" Bellamy's bloodshot eyes were wide and blazing as he flung round. "I'll shut up when I've told Knight that it's wheel tramp that's goin' to kill you, an' me, an' Jimmy Lee when we——"

He broke off abruptly as Dal jerked his wrench in the direction of the watching girl. The Englishman quieted instantly. He glanced at her, then buttoned his coat with trembling fingers.

"Sorry," he muttered, and strode towards the door.

They watched him take a footpath which led direct to the Café Cigale.

THE old French barn faced on to a rubble littered courtyard. Poking up beyond the patchy colored roofs of adjacent buildings showed the flags and bunting which decked the grandstands, built at the side of the course.

On the evening air sounded a vibrant murmur, the merged voices of thousands of race mad Latins, camping overnight around the Beaudricourt circuit. Every little while, the shattering thunder of an unmuffled exhaust struck with a sudden roar through all other sound, as anxious mechanics made last minute adjustments to some racing motor.

Not until Cliff Bellamy's wiry, quick moving figure had vanished, did Hammond Knight speak.

"Morgan, you might get him out of that, later on," he added casually. "Everything's in trim here, isn't it? I'll follow the mechanics down to the pits and check over what they're doing."

He strolled from the building, thickset and implacable. Dal dived under the hood again. Jim secured the end of the cord and, from the corners of his eyes, he saw Marion come quickly around the car, until she was bending beside him.

"Jimmy, what did Cliff mean about the cars being death traps?" she half whispered.

Jim Lee stood up.

"Nothing. They're all right!"

He smiled a little. He was tall and sinewy, and his face was wind whipped to a ruddy brown, out of which his eyes showed with the blue peculiar to sailors and speedmen.

"There is something wrong with them," she insisted. Her hand closed over his own for a moment, and he felt the pressure of her slim fingers. "What is it, Jimmy? I've a—a right to know, haven't I?" Her voice was the merest breath as she held his gaze. She saw his lips tighten. Then he called:

"Dal, we've never had any trouble with the machines, have we?"

"Eh?" Dal Morgan came whirling round, and his voice was emphatic as he growled: "Cliff's been bending his elbow too much over at that café! He's got a crazy idea about his front wheels juddering at speed, but there's nothing to it. He'll forget about it once we're in the race."

Marion looked from Jim to Dal, and back to Jim again. Carefully, she rolled the silk around the cleaned goggles.

"I'm sure there's something the matter with the cars. And uncle's known it all along," she said slowly. "If you won't tell me, Jimmy, I'll find Cliff and ask him."

She pitched the goggles into the narrow cockpit and moved towards the door. Jimmy started after her, but he checked as Morgan's hand came on his arm.

"Let her go. Cliff's got enough sense to keep his mouth closed," he grunted.

The two watched Marion along the footpath. The evening sunlight caught the silvery streaks in Morgan's graying hair and limned his square cut face. There was a queer expression in his eyes as he stared half unseeingly before him.

He turned abruptly to where the slanting sunbeams shone on the speckless motor beneath the uplifted hood of his machine. It was as he picked his wrench from where it lay on the fat, fluted bulk of the supercharger that Jim suddenly started after Marion.

She heard him running up as she turned a corner of the path, and she stopped where the angle of an outbuilding of the French farm screened her from chance glances.

"Marion, there's absolutely no need for you to worry," Jimmy assured the girl. "The cars are sound all through, honestly they are!"

"You're telling me a lie, Jimmy, aren't you? It would be ever so much better if you'd let me know the worst."

"But there isn't any worst, Marion. The machines are a little light, but that's all," he assured her. "Cliff's excitable, and he's got an idea——"

He broke off. She was smiling faintly, and she reached out to press his arm gently.

"That's no good, Jimmy. I know you too well to be deceived. You see, dear, I can remember when dad was killed at Indianapolis, years ago. It was one of uncle's machines that he was driving then, and—and I'm afraid that a Knight car is going to take you away from me, too."

Her voice was tremulous, but it steadied with her last words and she faced him squarely.

"I thought you'd signed to drive a Knight machine just because you'd be near me, but there's more to it than that, Jimmy. You could have driven for any racing team that you liked, but you——"

"There are two reasons why I'm riding a Knight in this Grand Prix," he cut in quickly. "One is because I knew you'd be around the racing camp, and the other is simply because your uncle offered me a better contract for the race than anybody else." His eyes were alight, but his voice was low as he went on: "If I win, I'll pull down something like twenty thousand in hard cash, and that means . . . Oh, well, you know what it means."

She drew her hands away from his as he bent forward.

"We've talked about that, dear, and I've told you money doesn't count that much with me."

He went on eagerly, as if not hearing her veiled protests.

"After the race, we'll tell your uncle about it. I'm going to ask old Dal to be my best man, and——"

"Yes, yes," Marion's tone was almost impatient. "But you don't know what I'm feeling now, Jimmy. Why don't you tell me what's wrong?" She leaned forward, tense. "Jimmy, uncle has never had three drivers like those he's engaged for this race. There's Cliff Bellamy: he's made a mess of his life and he's as reckless as a man can be, simply because he doesn't care what happens to him. Uncle's taken him on, but no other firm would trust him with a car!

"There's Dal: he's been in Europe four years, and he's never been able to win enough money to raise the fare home. He's been a great driver, but everybody says he's too old for a big race. Has uncle given him a mount because he knows that Dal will ride the limit—because it's his last chance?"

Jim did not answer. Her wide eyes held his gaze.

"And there's you! Everybody over here thinks a lot of you, Jimmy. You've made a name since you quit the board tracks back home and began racing on the road circuits here. You could have driven for any firm you liked. Last year I saw you win at San Sebastian with a car that was almost falling to bits. Uncle knows you never let up once the starter's flag drops." She laughed a little. Then added, "That's what I like about you, dear."

"You've got it all wrong, Marion," he tried to protest.

"I haven't got it all wrong. I'm right!" she insisted. "Cliff's desperate, so is Dal, and so are you—because if you win, you think we can be married. But I'll marry you any time, win or lose, darling. Only I'm afraid, so terribly afraid that something is going to happen!"

She went on before he could speak:

"Why didn't uncle bring drivers out from home with the cars, this time? Why did he wait until he got to Europe. And why has he chosen men like you three to drive? Cliff said that the cars were death-traps, that they'll get wheel tramp and——"

"They won't! Dal and I have tried them out for that, and they're perfectly safe."

"Then there's something else," she said. She stepped closer and caught his arms as she looked up at him. "Jimmy, just think of me sitting in the pit, waiting to hear that something has happened to you, not even knowing what there is to fear."

"Now, listen, Marion: there's absolutely nothing that Dal and I are afraid of in this race." Jim spoke quietly, but even as he heard his own words he sensed the lack of conviction in them. "There's only one car that can beat us, and that's Brook's machine, the Broyt Special."

"The one they call *Calamity Kate?*" she asked.

"Yes, but I think we can whip it, because I doubt if it'll stand the distance."

"And that's all you're afraid of—*Calamity Kate?*"

"Yes, that's all."

Marion looked at him for what seemed a long time, gazing into his clear eyes and trying to read what was in their depths.

"All right, Jimmy, I'll try and believe you. But I'm going to talk to Cliff Bellamy, all the same."

She walked on alone.

CLIFF BELLAMY had come back and was talking to Dal when Jim returned to the Knight racing stable.

"Thought I'd better look in and apologize," he said. "I forgot the girl was here, or I wouldn't have let rip. But Knight made me wild. Why doesn't he come straight out with it that the cars are dangerous, and let us know where we stand?"

The English driver looked quickly from Jim to Dal, and went on:

"He's taken away every ounce of metal that he can pare off 'em, and the engines are too powerful for the weight they're carrying. I'm scared of what's going to happen to me. I'll get wheel tramp. I know it! I saw——"

"For heaven's sake shut up about that!" Morgan growled.

"Ever had wheel tramp—ever *seen* it?" Cliff's dissipated face was working, and his bloodshot eyes narrowed. "I saw Barney O'Dell get it along the straightaway to Mulsanne, at Le Mans. You know how a car will sort of float when she's hitting the high spots? It's then that a pothole will start it.

"Barney was steady as a rock until the machine did a kind of cat jump and looked blurred—that was the judder starting. She began to tramp with her front wheels, to lift 'em one after the other as though she was walking. It was a horrible thing to see. She just walked out of control and rolled over on him."

He added grimly:

"His car was too light, like ours! You don't get wheel tramp until you've got your bus moving at the peak of her speed, and you don't find out that you *can* get it until you're in a race with your foot hard down and all hell in front o' you."

Jim and Dal glanced at one another, and the old speedman growled:

"Cliff, you're spending too much time over at that café. Your nerves are all raw. And let me tell you that you can get wheel tramp at any speed if your machine's suspension isn't right. These cars are light, and they won't be easy to hold to the road, but there's not a wobble in any of them."

"Then why did Knight give me a mount, eh?" asked Cliff. "Answer me that! I know the reputation I've got. He called me a drink sodden rake when I asked for a car last year. But he lets me ride now because he knows I'll keep my foot flat on the grid—I'll 'step on the gas,' all the time, as you fellows would say.

"And I'll tell you why I pretty nearly live in that café: there's a girl there. She's with that dancing troupe, and she's a good kid. She comes from Oxford, and that's where I was born. And she's game to hook up with me after the race—and then I'll make another start. But if I get it on the circuit, then she'll have my insurance money, and she'll be there to close my eyes when they've dragged me from under——"

"For God's sake, don't talk like that, man!"

Old Dal spun on his heels and turned away, to stare into the darkness of the shed. He rubbed the back of an oil smirched hand across a forehead that had suddenly become dewed with sweat.

"If you feel yellow about things, keep it to yourself," he growled across his shoulder. "You're making me shaky!"

Jim turned away. He fiddled with the silk wrapped goggles in his cockpit.

He heard Cliff shuffle uneasily, and presently Dal turned again. His voice was controlled as he said:

"I'll tell you what Hammond Knight is after. There aren't many who know it, but he's on his last legs, and the Broyt people have offered to buy him out. Knight's trying to capture a share of European sales through the big races and save himself. That's why he was over here last year with a team. He didn't do any good then, but I'll say that Hammond Knight is one of the cleverest designers that ever stepped!

"The motors he's put into these three machines are just wonderful. He's never done anything better! If we can win, it will put him square financially. That's why he wants three drivers who'll go into the race to win, and that's why he's paying big money."

Cliff stared at him blankly. In the background, Jim stiffened as he heard Dal go on:

"It's a case of win or bust with Knight machines. Brooks has put *Calamity Kate* into the race to cut us up. He's the man with the money in the Broyt firm, even if he does do a bit of driving this side for the fun of it. He reckons that *Calamity Kate* can wag her tail at anything else in the race—and maybe he's right.

"She's a special job designed for Broyt's by some Italian, and if Brooks can put it across us he'll be able to make his own terms with Knight when the amalgamation comes off. That's the strength of it all, and that's why Knight has lightened these cars. He wanted to be sure that they'd be fast enough to win."

"I never knew he was nearly broke," Cliff muttered. "Not that it makes any difference to the chances we've got to take. *Calamity Kate's* a fast machine, but Jimmy will look after her, only—" He broke off, then stepped closer, and his eyes were dark as he added: "Only don't sit too near Brooks' tail, Jimmy. That car isn't called *Calamity Kate* for nothing."

THE Café Cigale was a long, one storied building standing a little way back from the Beaudricourt circuit. A broad, striped awning at the front sheltered scattered tables which overflowed to the graveled stretch before the building. Here, racing crews gathered to gossip and to swap lies.

Marion had never been inside the café. The interior was a garish, glass clinking, hysterical appendage to the quiet groups of racing men at the tables in the open air outside.

She looked for Cliff, but she could not find him, and she joined a big group at a little cluster of tables. She talked with quiet spoken women, wives of men in the morrow's race. There were French and Italian, English and German women, and their little scraps of race gossip were couched in a mixture of languages from which one thing came clearly: they talked mainly of *Calamity Kate*.

The Broyt racing camp claimed that this car could do a hundred and fifty miles an hour, given the right conditions. She had front drive and independently sprung rear wheels, and every table outside the Café Cigale believed that the weird machine towed a broad streak of bad luck at its tail.

On the first day of practice, a car following *Calamity Kate* down the grandstand stretch had got out of control where the straightaway turned at Cinq Chemins Corner, and the star driver of a French team had gone to hospital. Two days later the same thing had happened to another machine in following *Calamity Kate* around one of the fastest curves of the course. When yet a third car had come to disaster on *Calamity Kate's* tail, it became an understood thing that she should be given a clear mile of margin whenever she showed up during practice.

Now and again, someone would mention Knight cars. Marion followed up every hint that she got. By the time Jim came seeking her through the dusk, she knew that everything on Knight machines had been sacrificed for their motors, and that metal had been taken from the chassis to lend strength to the power unit.

Racewise men said that the motors would outlast half a dozen speed events, but that it was a thousand to one chance that some other part of the cars would fail ere the Grand Prix had gone a dozen laps.

She came to understand that Jim had been afraid to tell her of this, or to speak of the awful hazard a man must run when, say, a lightened front axle breaks at speed, or a weakened frame fractures under the battering punishment of a torn road. . . .

She visioned her uncle as a cynical brute who had deliberately fashioned his machines in the hope that one of the three might come through to the winner's flag, caring nothing for what happened to the men who drove the others.

She also discovered the full meaning of wheel tramp, and the horror which must live with a driver who has reason to fear it.

Of these things she said nothing to Jim when they left the café behind and walked from the course along a straight, narrow French lane. They walked until the café was a glow of hot light behind them, the open fields around deckled with the ruddy campfires of spectators.

When they stopped, the town showed as a muddled blur and, silhouetted against the moonlit sky, they could see the grandstands, flags and bunting, dark against the stars. Here, close beneath the gaunt shadow of a poplar tree, Marion thrilled to the embrace of Jim's strength filled arms.

"If I win, this will be my last race," he whispered.

"Your last race, whether you win or not, Jimmy." And she held him tightly.

"I've got an idea about building a garage somewhere back home," he told her. "Maybe we'd have the front of it put up with old black wood, like some of those English filling stations."

"Tudor style?" She smiled up at him. "And I'd grow flowers for you between the gasoline pumps, in little green boxes, just like one that I saw at Stratford-on-Avon!"

He laughed a little, but she was quick to see that his laughter was forced, and her manner changed.

"Jimmy, promise me now that you'll not race after we're married. Those women in front of the café—I've been talking to them. They were smiling then, but they'll be crying tonight—waiting for tomorrow. They say that *Calamity Kate* will set a killing pace, and everybody will have to drive like mad to keep up. They say it's going to be awful. The fastest race ever run and——"

"I'm hoping that the Broyt will blow up before half distance." She could feel his hand quivering as it caressed her cheek. "Darling, I'm—I'm scared about tomorrow. I'll admit it. I've never been frightened about a race before, but this time—I—I——"

He pulled himself up. She could see his face, set and pallid in the shadows, his eyes wide as he stared before him. He seemed suddenly to realize that he had let his feelings escape him.

"Just nerves, of course. There's so much hanging on to it!" He smiled down at her. "Let's go back, shall we? I'll need to be about early in the morning."

They had to pass the Café Cigale. The tables at the front were empty, but the interior was lively from the strains of a band and shrill voices. A side door opened as they approached, and it slammed behind three figures which crossed the path just ahead.

Cliff Bellamy was being supported by Dal Morgan and a girl. Marion saw her small features, eyes wide and lashes heavy with makeup. They heard Cliff's voice, thick and slurred:

" 'S all right, Peggy, I'm insured for fi' thousan' pounds. 'S wheel tramp's goin' to walk me off the circuit in the mornin', but you'll get the money, every penny. I've 'ranged it, darlin'. When they bring me in, you close m' eyes an'——"

"Shut up!" They saw old Dal shake him viciously, and Cliff's voice choked off, "Damn you, shut up!"

WEDGED in the narrow cockpit of his machine, Jim sat with one foot rammed on the clutch pedal, gear shift snubbed across to second and the needle surging on the colored dial of his revolution counter as his exhaust chuttered on a spanging, vicious note.

The road stretched wide and straight before him, packed grandstands on one side and flaring scoreboards at the other. Twenty yards ahead, a narrow footbridge straddled the course, and at the foot of the bridge stood the tense figure of the starter, flag raised and twitching. There was to be no rolling start. When the flag dropped, the race was on!

From the tail of his eye Jim could see Cliff Bellamy, goggled eyes glaring forward, face pale and purposeful. On Jim's right a Lombard stormed with leashed fury.

Jim's brain shook from the mad thunder of waiting machines beside and in the rows behind him—Alfa-Romeo, Mercedes, Broyt, Delage, Bugatti and a lone white Miller, its transmission stiffened and a French count at the wheel. The cars were squat blurs of blazing color shining through the blue haze of oil fumes that whipped from bellowing exhausts.

The red flag jerked above the head of the starter. It slid downwards, blood red in the brilliant sunlight. Driving wheels threshed as they scrabbled for grip on the road surface, and the neat rows broke as machines plunged forward.

The crashing tumult of the massed start struck on the air like something solid. The cars slid past the stands in a bunch, roaring shapes of straining mechanism, each blaring a furious challenge and showing in flashes of sunlit brilliance through the dust stamped upwards by their striving tires.

Jim dropped the bellowing Lombard behind. Cliff fell away, according to plan, as the flag decked stands vanished in a haze of bunting. Cliff was to ride fourth, and Dal was to sit in seventh place. Jim was to make the pace with *Calamity Kate,* if he could, and the other two would be ready to move up if anything happened to him.

An Alfa-Romeo poked its flaming red hood up to Jim's elbow as both shot clear of the milling, raucous pack of jammed cars behind. They held together for a hundred yards, then the crackling blare of the Italian machine was lost as it slid back along the Knight's kicking tail.

The crowds were gone now. Trees that lined the gray-white straight changed to a slithering mass of dull green, sweeping away at either side. The road before Jim's eyes was a streaky stretch of shadow dappled emptiness, tapering in the distance to Cinq Chemins, the first corner of the triangular eight mile circuit.

He had won clear of the murderous dogfight which was going on behind him. In the tiny rear-view mirror riveted back of the scuttle, he could see the swirling dust spume in which the rest were moving. And out of it *Calamity Kate* was streaking, coming up to make the pace.

Jim saw the low built shape rocking towards his tail, front wheels pounding the road. He heard the furious scream of the Broyt special's supercharger above the Knight's full blooded bellow, then he forgot *Calamity Kate* as the outer sandbank of the corner showed ahead like a yellow wall.

The palisade beyond it was lurid with vivid advertisement banners. Faces showed banked above the woodwork, gray ovals that pitched to meet him as *Calamity Kate* came up to challenge for the corner.

In a tornado of shattering sound the machines stormed at the turn, both cars holding their speed until the last possible moment; then the screech of biting brake shoes rose above all else. Jim felt the Knight quiver and jump as he trod on the brake pedal, juddering wildly because of her lightness and her speed. She skidded and he went sideways for yards, heart leaping in his chest.

He straightened the sliding machine, but the check sent *Calamity Kate* ahead, and she was still ahead as they flung round the curve, the pack milling in their dust behind.

From a bump, the Knight bucked wildly, frame hitting the axles as she came down. She hadn't the weight to hold the road, and she skittered madly until Jim fought her straight and sent her on.

Calamity Kate was a bare dozen yards ahead. Stones cracked like bullets on the grid guard before the Knight's radiator, slung by the whirring wheels of the leading machine.

The Broyt special was the faster car, but Jim knew that he must strive to hold the pace she set. He must ride his light and leaping Knight as near its limit as he dared, in the hope that *Calamity Kate* would not last and that, in the cracking pace they set together, other rival machines would break beneath the strain.

Not until he was on his second lap, when everything about the Knight was heated to fighting pitch, did Jim shape to pass *Calamity Kate.* Each time he tried, her driver increased his speed and held his distance, so that they started the third lap at a pace which left the Knight with only the shade of power in reserve that every racing driver holds until there comes the desperate need to drive flat out.

With that third lap, every pit on the course was flying "all out" signals to other cars, bidding their drivers close up on the dueling leaders for fear they should get too far ahead.

It was the first time that Jim had ever ridden behind *Calamity Kate*. He braced his head against the tearing wind which whipped past the little, wire guarded shield as he stared ahead at the machine.

Its rear wheels were independently sprung. When a wheel dropped into a pothole, or kicked from a bump, the car itself did not leap from the impact. Only the one wheel moved, and it gave an unnatural appearance to the car.

There was, Jim told himself as he followed the machine through the quick curves of the circuit, something unreal about *Calamity Kate,* something uncanny, and something almost laughable. It was silly the way the machine kept kicking with only one wheel, as though that wheel had nothing to do with the car. It was fascinating to watch.

So fascinating that he went into the next corner at a hundred and ten miles an hour.

He saved himself by taking the turn in a skid that sent spectators leaping for safety, and it needed all his strength to fight the car out of its skid. He left an odor of burnt brake linings behind him, and the pungent reek of hot rubber rose from the jet black marks drawn by locked tires on the road.

Heart thumping, mouth hot and dry, he found *Calamity Kate* still just ahead of him, flirting her rear wheels in a jeering way, as though the car knew that it had almost lured him to his death.

"That's what must have happened to those three during practice!" The thought snapped through his brain. "They must have been watching the damned car like I was, and . . ."

He rammed his foot down on the long accelerator pedal, kicking the throttle wide and giving the Knight the little power that he had been holding in reserve.

The machine surged forward, dancing from her speed as she leaped level with the short, thick tail of *Calamity Kate.* Her driver saw Jim come up. He sent the hoodoo car further ahead and held his lead.

"He's playing with me! He could leave me behind, but he wants to keep me just at his tail!" Lips moving on Jim's dust filmed teeth formed the words. *Calamity Kate* had the speed of him, but she would not go ahead.

Her driver knew the effect of his machine on a following driver. He knew the way *Calamity Kate* gibed and scoffed at pursuers with her queer rear wheels and wagging tail. Already she had taunted the fine drawn Knight to a cruel speed that, soon, must surely fracture her slender steel and send man and machine to the roadside in a welter of smoking wreckage.

MARION watched the race from behind the tool cluttered plank which ran along the front of the Knight replenishment pit. Leaning against the wire mesh which cut them off from the next bay was the girl from the Café Cigale, speaking but seldom.

The mechanics were quiet. Each man was waiting for news that one of the machines had broken something vital and had crashed. The race was being run at an impossible pace, and it seemed that even if the Knights could endure it, then the men must crack under the strain of fighting the lightly built cars.

More than half the race was run when Hammond Knight flagged Jim in for fresh fuel. His mechanic leaped from the pit, working with tigerish fury the instant that the machine stopped. Jim wore a mask of oil and grime. His eyes, when he lifted his goggles, were quirked and lined at the corners. There were more lines running down from his nose to his lips, and he did not seem to notice that it was Marion who pushed a brimming glass towards him when he came to the pit plank.

His hands were quivering from driving strain when he swilled out his parched mouth and then drank. He was off again before she realized it.

Cliff was flagged in, braking wildly to a stop. There was a glare in his eyes, but he had a smile for the girl who bent towards him at Marion's side, watching as he worked. He went away with a smashing roar and a flirt of his hand towards her.

Three laps after his stop, Cliff did not come round.

Ten seconds late . . . twenty . . . half a minute.

"Burst a tire, maybe," said a mechanic, and they hung over the pit plank to look for him.

"Something's broken! They're not built for the bashing they're gettin'!" growled his mate. "There's not one Knight'll stay for the finish!"

"It's wheel tramp!" Peggy clutched at Marion's hand. "He—he knew he'd get it! He—he—" Her lips were quivering, and her face was drained of all its color under the rouge and powder.

"Don't! He'll be round in a minute." Marion slipped an arm about her shoulders and held the girl tightly as she saw a marshal running towards the pit. He was shouting half heard words to Hammond Knight:

"Numero huit . . . brisé . . . Cinq Chemins! Le conducteur. . . ."

"Wrecked at Cinq Chemins!" a mechanic gasped.

"He's not hurt? Cliff's all right—he isn't hurt?" Peggy was tugging at his sleeve, her face piteous.

"Don't know. But the boss is going. Over the bridge—quick!"

She dragged at Marion's hand, and both ran from the pit. A car was waiting beyond the footbridge and they crowded into it alone with Knight and several panting men. The machine roared with blaring hooter down a winding lane and, in a little while, they saw a pall of blue-gray smoke just beyond Cinq Chemins Corner.

Cliff's car lay crumpled at the foot of a tree, the shattered wreckage of the engine driven back almost into the cockpit. Front wheels were splayed out in a tangle of rubber and broken spokes, and the side of the machine was a scarred mass of riven metal.

Poilus were holding men back, and a little group bent where Bellamy had been carried clear; his white clad figure sprawled on the grass, overalls touched with dull red.

Peggy twisted past the Frenchman who tried to stop her, just as the twin roar of *Calamity Kate* and Jim's Knight—riding together again—sounded on the turn. They went past, lashing stones from the torn up road surface, with Jim bending sideways in the cockpit, goggles black as he looked at the wreck and the group beside it.

"He'll think it was wheel tramp!" Marion sobbed. She broke through the half formed cordon of helmeted soldiers in field blue, and ran to where Hammond Knight was trying to lift Peggy as she knelt at Cliff's head.

"Uncle, what was it? What made him crash?"

"I don't know. He's unconscious. But I'll swear nothing on the car let him down!"

"Was it wheel tramp? *Was it?*" Marion's voice was clear through the blast of machines battling round Cinq Chemins. "Jimmy will worry. Did something break?" She tried to shake him out of his immobility, until she saw that he was gazing past her, his eyes widening from something akin to dread.

A man from the Knight pit was rushing towards them, sweat channeling the oily grime that streaked his cheeks, his breath coming in great, sobbing gasps.

"Dal's got it! Ran off the road at Bruay, tryin' to pass the Lombard. They're both wrecked!"

JIM, taking the Bruay bend in the road spume at *Calamity Kate's* tail, saw a marshal craning out on the road, flailing the air with a red "caution" flag. There were more flags heaving on the corner itself, and through a dark blur of smoke, right across the course, he saw the Lombard on its side, one wheel still spinning.

Men were wrenching and tearing at something trapped in the smoke-filled cockpit, while others strove to drag the car off the road. Further on was the wreck of Dal's machine, shattered radiator stubbed into a grassy bank, front wheels broken at the stub axles. Men were carrying Dal's limp form clear of the débris.

Jim's Knight lurched as he saw the wreck. He yanked the car straight, thoughts beating in his brain. Both crashed . . . Both with front axles wrecked . . . Was it wheel tramp? . . . Were they hurt—badly? . . . Had something given under the strain of the race and sent them off the road.

Cliff and Dal had crashed within a couple of laps of one another. It meant that, even now, there might be a creeping flaw in his own machine, reaching out to pluck him to disaster. The cars were all built alike!

Hammond Knight must have taken a chance too many in scraping metal off the frames and axles. If something had broken, his was the responsibility—juggling with the lives of good men! He might be a clever designer, but he might have made a mistake, and it might be just by luck that Knight No. 1 was still on the course.

Jim strained to look at his pit as he passed, searching for signals which would tell him why the others had crashed. The pit was almost empty except for his own mechanic. He slowed for Cinq Chemins Corner, but no signals came from the men there. He had to drive on without knowing what had happened to the others, or whether the same fate might be waiting for him around the next corner.

"Wheel tramp . . . Must have been!" he thought. "Well, I don't quit. If it's coming to me, I'll take it, and I'll be in front of this damned Broyt Special when it comes!"

He rammed his foot down and the Knight poked her staggered radiator level with *Calamity Kate's* tail. The Broyt Special was beginning to flag under the stress of the speed she had sustained, and her motor was losing its tune.

The Knight's power unit was as healthy as it had been on the first lap, and *Calamity Kate* could not get away as Jim pulled out to pass. He felt the car judder as she took the broken edge of the road. And then the steering wheel was kicking and wrenching madly under his hands.

"Wobble!" He yelled the word, stamped on the brake and dragged the car back to the crown of the course as *Calamity Kate* shot ahead again. "I got it then!" The palms of his hands became hot and wet. "It's in the car. Cliff was right, by heaven—that's what's wrecked them!"

It had felt as though some giant hand had gripped his front wheels, jerking them to and fro with incredible rapidity. Not until he was coming down the straightaway past the stands did he catch *Calamity Kate,* and he was still trying to steady himself when he took Cinq Chemins Corner.

He saw the crowd there. Surely they'd signal now if Cliff was all right? If they couldn't tell him why the Englishman had crashed, they could let him know how much he was hurt. If he stopped to ask, it might mean losing the race. *Calamity Kate* might get ahead and he'd never make up the time. It must have been—*Marion!*

He saw her standing out from the side of the road, in front of the wreck, bending towards him. High above her head she was holding the flayed and twisted remnants of a burst tire! Behind her, Cliff was on his feet, Peggy helping him lift one arm so that he might wave as the Knight hurtled past.

"Burst tire—Cliff's O.K.!" That was the signal they were giving him. Marion had guessed what would be in Jim's mind.

They flashed behind. Again he crept up to *Calamity Kate,* again the machine's mocking wheels stamped stones back at him from either side of the niggling, flouting tail. Curves and bends held the Knight back until the roofs at Bruay Corner slid out of the sun shot trees.

Jim cleared the turn, and he craned from the side of the car as he saw Dal standing by the wreck, three men holding him up, one with blood-stained gauze rammed to the side of the driver's grizzled head.

Dal saw Jim come. He pointed to the Lombard, then swept both hands from his own machine to the other wreck.

"Skidded into him on the bend!" Jim waved a hand as he guessed the meaning of Dal's gestures. "It wasn't wheel tramp —and they're both all right!"

There was nothing to fear. It must have been bumps in the road that had made him wobble when he had tried to pass *Calamity Kate.* Any car would get wheel wobble if the surface were bad.

The black menace of wheel tramp had been wiped away. When Jim rocked into the straight, the flags and bunting on the stands seemed to be full of color, and the thunder of the Knight swelled to a joyous bellow as she slid to *Calamity Kate's* tail.

Jim could see the braced head of the driver, jowl dark with oil blown back from his motor. His hands were clamped on the cord bound wheel, dials were dancing with the instrument board, flashing in the sunshine.

The Knight crept past. *Calamity Kate* seemed to scream as she dropped behind, and there was a curse in the whine of her supercharger. Beyond Cinq Chemins her driver flogged her to the limit down the long and winding slope which lay there. Every bolt and nut was quivering under the lashing strain as she pulled out and strove to snatch the lead again.

Aided by the gradient, moving at colossal speed, she came up. Jim could see her in his rear-view mirror, huge and menacing. His Knight was at the peak of its speed, but still *Calamity Kate* came on, riding him down, with both machines touching a pace neither had reached before.

Jim heard the voice of the Broyt Special, wild and shrill, lifting to crescendo—and changing suddenly!

In that moment *Calamity Kate* quivered from radiator to tail. The gray-black shape of the threshing front wheels thickened, became blurred. One of them lifted, then the other followed. *Tramping!*

Wobbling madly, the front wheels stepped on the road in an incredible, unnatural way, lifting higher and higher, tilting the car in drunken gait.

Calamity Kate was all but on the Knight when the tramping wheels stepped too far. Jim, head half turned, saw the machine pitch over, then leap high.

There was a rending, penetrating crash and the roadside was blotted out in a titanic fount of dust in the heart of which was a pounding, jerking, slithering shape. *Calamity Kate* hurling herself to cataclysmic disaster.

WHEN the black and white folds of the winner's flag slid on the afternoon breeze, they welcomed the race racked, dust lashed shape of the only Knight left in the Grand Prix d'Europe.

When darkness cloaked the course, souvenir hunters were still picking bits of *Calamity Kate* from the trees she had struck and from the earthen bank in which she had tried to dig her own grave. Her driver lay in hospital, nursing three broken ribs as memento of a miraculous escape.

Moonlight drifted through the doorway of the dark barn which formed the Knight racing camp. The silvery beams tinted the stone battered bulk of Jim's machine, its reeking cockpit full of flowers and its dented radiator guard pointed to where Marion and Jim stood.

"Cliff limped over to the hotel a little while ago," she said, "to apologize to uncle for doubting that the cars were sound. He says he's going to marry Peggy, and uncle's offered him a contract to come back with us and go into the works."

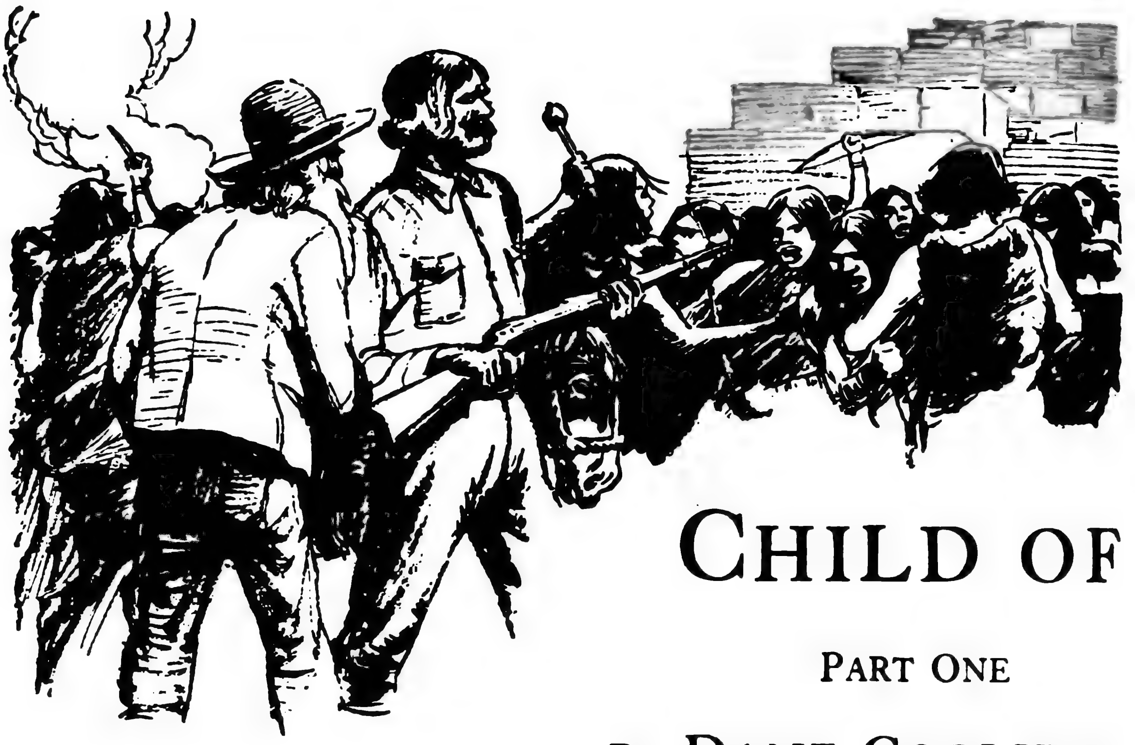
"He'll be all right. The girl will steady him now," Jim told her. "His nerves were bad. That's why the wheel tramp bogey worried him. It's queer that *Calamity Kate* should get it instead."

"The bogey worried you, too—and me!" Marion smiled through the dusk. "And Dal! I can't help thinking about him. Peggy will look after Cliff, and you've got me, but Dal has nobody."

"Maybe he'll help us run that little garage, dear—the one with the Tudor front! There'll be room for him, and he can water the flowers you'll grow between the gasoline pumps."

"And I'll keep the speed bogeys away from you both!"

She kissed him again.



CHILD OF

PART ONE

By DANE COOLIDGE

CHAPTER I

A SON OF THE VIKINGS

WITH the salt spray on his cheeks, his sea blue eyes gleaming, his yellow beard whipping in the wind, a son of the Vikings stood on the prow of a ship as it plowed up the harbor to New York. Nine hundred years before, their long swords on their hips, their shields hanging over the bulwarks, the sea rovers of Lief Ericson had cruised these same shores and named the country Vinland. They had come from the north, sailing down from storm-swept Greenland; Anthony Gambel steamed back from the south, the first white man to penetrate San Blas.

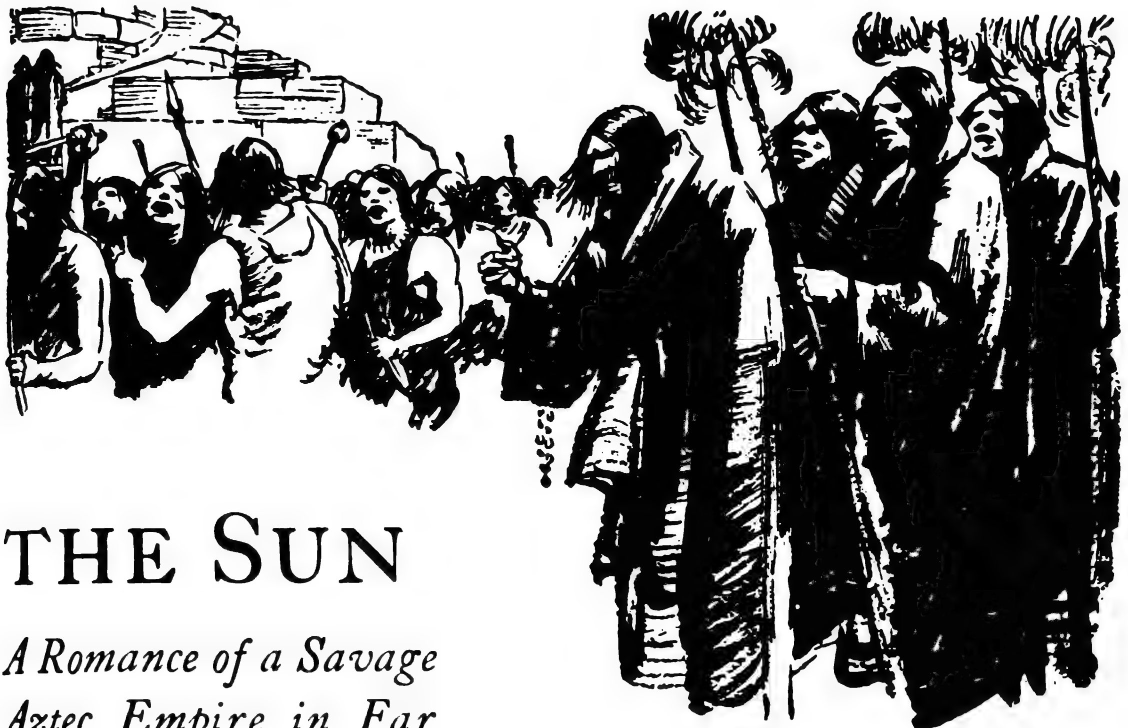
For five hundred years, despite the attacks of the Spaniards, the White Indians of Darien had turned back all intruders, or killed them with poisoned arrows. But they had gold, for they brought it in goose quills to trade and they beat it into nose rings for their women, and every age sent its quota of adventurers. Yet no man ever entered the forbidden land of the Warraus until Anthony Gambel came. He went in alone and the jungles closed over him as they had over all the rest; but a year later he returned, laden with treasures for his museum and reverenced by the natives as a god.

Now, as his ship entered the harbor, hoarse whistles joined in a salute to the man who had returned from the dead. Reporters crowded about him, photographers whipped out their cameras as they spied his uncut beard; and he answered their questions and posed amiably in the sun.

A week passed and the city forgot the tall, reserved man who had penetrated the Unknown Land. He had clipped the Viking beard and the tawny, yellow hair which had made him, to the Indians, a god; and as he threaded the echoing cañons of the crowded streets no one turned to mark his course. The sun touched a mighty tower that rose above the rest like the temple of some god of gods and, entering at its base, he unlocked a secret room and rang the bell for his chief.

Ogilvie Smith in his great office closed his desk and opened a door to which he alone had the key. Then, locking it behind him, he turned to greet the man that men said had returned from the dead.

"Anthony!" he cried, advancing to seize his hand. "Back from San Blas—alive



THE SUN

A Romance of a Savage Aztec Empire in Far Yucatan

and well! By the gods, I don't see how you do it!"

"It's easy," smiled Gambel. "I understand them."

"Yes, but why didn't they kill you?" demanded Smith. "Oh, I know what the papers say. But on the level, Anthony—leaving out your doctoring and all that—what hocus-pocus did you use?"

"That's a long story," answered Gambel. "Here's something more interesting." And he laid a sheaf of papers on the table.

"What?" exclaimed his chief. "Did you find what we're looking for? Oil!"

"It's there," responded Gambel. "Lots of it. Here's a map, and my detailed report."

Smith's ruddy cheeks paled as he ran over the report, then he sat back and nodded to his scout.

"Mister Gambel," he said, "you have done a great work. This report is worth millions. Millions. Not that anything will be done now to disturb your precious Indians—that would give our whole system away—but the knowledge that Darien is a potential oil reservoir is of inestimable value to the company. And to the nation. Now what compensation do you want?"

"Well—" began Gambel, and then he stopped short. "As you know, Ogilvie," he said at last, "this scouting for oil is only a side issue, with me. As long as the company supports my anthropological work I am satisfied to continue as before."

"Now, now Anthony," protested Smith, laying a hand on his arm. "Please consider this in a practical way. The founding of museums and the financing of expeditions is merely a means to an end, with us. If our purpose were known—that we are prospecting for oil—every door would be closed against us. The Latin-American governments would hold us up for millions; they would demand huge payments and concessions. But when, as a scientist, you present your credentials and request their permission to explore, these same politicians who would be the first to gouge us extend every aid to you. And your work, Anthony, goes beyond mere exploration. You are the kindly forerunner of civilization's irresistible advance. You have the power to win the friendship of all these savage tribes whose countries are underlaid with oil. Have you thought what that is worth to the company?"

"Well—no," admitted Gambel. "Somehow money doesn't interest me. It's the work itself that I love. But of course if the company wants to give me a bonus I wouldn't go so far as to refuse."

"Now you're talking!" Smith smiled, unfolded a fat wallet and counted out a sheaf of bills. "At our last directors' meeting we voted—in secret, of course—to give you this twenty-five thousand. Anything more that you want, just ask for it."

He passed over the yellow gold notes and Gambel fingered them thoughtfully, then straightened up and looked at his chief.

"All right," he said. "Here's what I really want. Another assignment like San Blas."

"My God!" exclaimed Smith. "Are you trying to commit suicide? You've only been home a week. Have you been up to see your people? Don't you ever stop and rest? Why don't you act human, Anthony?"

"Oh, I'm human enough!" exclaimed Gambel. "It's you people in New York that aren't human. These buildings are so high they cut off the sun. This air isn't fit to breathe. I want to see the jungle again."

"Well," sighed Ogilvie, "whatever you want, Anthony. There's one job that's always open—no takers. But it's a mighty poor reward to a man that has done San Blas to send him down into Mixtlan."

"Mixtlan!" repeated Anthony, wide eyed. "Is that assignment still open?"

"You know why," shrugged Smith. "And we're not the only company, either. There are three scouts that I know of, besides Darlington and Bird, that were never heard from again."

"What happens to them?" demanded Gambel.

"We don't know," evaded Smith. "What happened to the others at San Blas?"

"They forced their way in and were killed," answered Anthony. "But I don't work that way."

"Then just how do you work?" inquired the chief. "I've always been curious to know."

"Will you give me the assignment to Mixtlan?"

"If you want it," agreed Smith reluctantly.

"Then I'll tell you," returned Gambel, smiling curiously. "Because, of course, I may not come back. It's very simple, Ogilvie. Did you ever notice the color of my hair?"

"Bright red," grinned Smith, "like the aurora borealis; tinged with yellow, like the setting sun. What's that got to do with the case?"

"Just this," replied Anthony. "A man with golden hair is almost like a god among those Indians. There isn't a tribe from Sonora to the Isthmus that haven't been sun worshipers, at some time. And the sun god, Quetzalcoatl, was the greatest of all their divinities. Undoubtedly he was a man, a culture hero."

"A man!" echoed Smith incredulously.

"A man," repeated Gambel. "And here's what I'm coming to: he was a man with yellow hair. When the sun was setting in the Western Waters he came down its path to the shore. Some say he paddled backwards—rowing, you see, like a European. But they all agree on this: he was a tall man, with blue eyes, and a long white gown, his face was white, and he had a yellow beard and hair that stood out like plumes of fire. Do you remember my beard, when I landed?"

"And your hair!" exclaimed Smith. "This is wonderful."

"It's as simple," stated Gambel, "as the rest of my system. All I do with these Indians is respect their women and their religion, whatever it is; and the rest works out of itself. As you know, I'm quite a doctor, a rough surgeon and bone setter; and that seems a miracle to them. Besides that I'm a man who was born without fear, although I don't claim any credit for that. But these, you understand, were the attributes of their god. And as it happened, he promised to return.

"THIS sun god, whoever he was, landed somewhere on the West Coast and traveled east until he came to the Atlantic. He taught the natives to work in metals and established strict laws regarding marriage and morals and health. Undoubtedly he was a white man; perhaps one of the ancient Norsemen who had been shipwrecked on some wandering voyage. The Toltec temple at Cholula was erected in his honor, and he lived there for many years. But when the Aztecs came south with their barbaric religion, based largely on human sacrifice to their war god, the worship of the sun god waned. He left Cholula and moved east, teaching the people as he passed; until at last, at the Eastern Waters, he built him a great canoe and disappeared into the rising sun."

"And he was a white man! You're sure of that? Then, Anthony, let me tell *you* something. These Indians in Mixtlan are a wild, savage lot; but in the last report that poor Darlington sent in he said that they worshiped a white woman."

"All nonsense," scoffed Gambel. "I guess I've proved that. Here for hundreds of years we've heard of the White Indians of Darien. I confess, that's what sent me to San Blas. But when I got in there I found nothing but some albinos. That White Indian myth is exploded. It all goes to prove how deep the feeling is that the sun god will sometime return, because the Indians believe that when he does come back he will lead them against their conquerors. That's why the San Blas Indians kept these pink eyed albinos that ordinarily would have been killed at birth; they hoped they would grow up into gods. But there's one test, Ogilvie, which we scientists apply to all these so-called White Indians, and that is the shape of the foot.

"An Indian's toes spread out, like all true savages'; but a white man's foot is straight, with a much shorter heel, and his second toe parallels the first. I've made quite a study of the bones of the foot on account of my work as a bone setter, but whether as doctor or scientist I've never seen a foot that couldn't be identified at once. It's a rule, without exception, that primitive toes spread out while a white man's toes lie parallel."

"Well, all right," agreed Smith. "Of course, you know your business. But at the same time, Anthony, all the reports we've received have made mention of White Indians in Mixtlan. The straight natives are a mixture of the original Zapotecs and a fighting remnant of the ancient Aztecas. They retreated, as you know, before the march of the Spaniards. But Von Humboldt, in 1803, was able to win their friendship—probably the last white man to enter their country. In fact, it's his account in 'The Voyage To The Equinoctial Regions Of The New Continent' that has started this search for oil. Even at that time, when its use was hardly known, he was greatly interested in petroleum, and certain allusions to the characteristic gray limestone have made its presence seem probable.

"Then again, there's the great commercial advantage of Mixtlan being close to the sea. Forty miles, I believe, from the summit of the Cohua Mountains to tide water, and all that that means. If there's oil inside that barrier, a way can be found to overcome these Indians' resistance; but for a hundred years, at least, no white man has come out alive. They've gone in, God knows! And that's the sinister part of it; for, once inside their borders—and they keep the passes guarded—a man is lost to the world. If he lives, which we doubt, he is kept there a slave. All we know is they never return."

"I'll return!" promised Gambel.

"So you say," sighed Smith. "But that's what Darlington said; and I thought a great deal of him, personally. I often blame myself for his death. Of course, we're like soldiers; we have to carry on, and our duty is to locate petroleum. But at the same time, Anthony, I'd feel a little better if you'd let this matter rest for a while. Stay at home a few months, finish your work at the museum, come out and see the wife and——"

"Man alive—no!" said Gambel. "I'm going. I've got to go. This damn city oppresses me. I can hardly sleep; I can't think. All I want is my orders, to Mixtlan."

"Very well," said Smith. "You've got 'em. Now what about this money? Would you like to have it put into stock?"

"Yes," Gambel replied. He stared out the window a moment. "I don't need it. But one day I may. Or somebody I would want to have it might find it useful. I shall leave you my will, instructing you in the event of my death to turn the sum over to—well, her name will be on the instrument."

Smith smiled with kindly shrewdness.

"I understand," he said. "I always thought some woman was behind all this, Anthony."

Gambel looked startled.

"Some woman—behind it?"

"Yes. Am I presuming too much on friendship in saying so?"

"Hell, no!" said Gambel gruffly. "You're right in a way. She's been married some time now. I just didn't belong, I guess. But I can't exactly forget, and—and I want to get out of this city. Will you take care of it for me?"

"Certainly. I'll call in one of our attorneys right now." Smith was matter of fact. He was a friend who knew when to keep his mouth shut.

The next morning Gambel started for Mixtlan.

CHAPTER II

THE JUNGLE

IT WAS to escape the memory of a woman that Anthony Gambel turned back to the jungle. She had seemed his woman—once. That had been a long time ago, yet he found it never quite possible to lose the recollection of her. He gave her no blame; as he said, they just did not belong. There had been a brief and ardent interval of love, and then a period of adjustment—in which any happy adjustment was impossible. She could not understand his ambitions, his restlessness; and he was out of sympathy with her effete, brilliant world.

They quarreled. They came together, and then in mingled heartache and bitterness quarreled again. They separated. And one day Anthony received a hurried summons to Mexico. A great expedition to explore the Sierra Madre had been formed at the Line, but one man had dropped out and to fill his place Anthony Gambel had received his call.

The next morning he was gone, on his way to Arizona, to Sonora, to Chihuahua, to Sinaloa; and the world closed in behind him. No letters came and he did not write, for there in the Sierra Madre he discovered the great passion of his life. He loved Indians. He thought as they thought. If to them a common stone was imbued with life, so that it grew and took cognizance of their offerings; then to him also each round stone grew outward like a puff ball and chambered in its heart a god. He loved Indians, and the Indians loved him.

Months passed away like days and the mysterious Sierras revealed natives whose existence was hardly known. Other members fell away until only Anthony was left to follow south after his chief; and then, greatly daring, they passed on from tribe to tribe until they came to the jungles of the Hot Country. Ancient temples, covered with lianas, filled their eyes and lured them on. They found idols, strange inscriptions, gold. And then as the fever laid low his leader, Anthony Gambel turned back to New York.

He found the woman he loved married, and apparently content with the outcome of their passion.

Now flying south again, and still further south, he came to windswept Chihuahua, to Zacatecas with its mines, to Irapuato with its strawberries, and at last to the City of Mexico. In the Zócolo he stood before the great cathedral where once the war god's temple had towered. There, five thousand human hearts had been offered in one day to the insatiate Huitzil Opochtli, and then Hernando Cortes had stormed the smoking heights and hurled the war god down.

The battle had raged for days, a few hundred men in armor against thousands of swarming warriors, and at last the Spaniards had won. Blood ran in the streets as they and their savage allies crushed Guatamotzin's desperate revolt, and when the war spirit of the Aztecs had flared up again the conquerors had destroyed them utterly. Their noble city had been razed, the temples and palaces thrown down, and the last remnant of their nation had retreated to the south where they had merged with the Indians of Tehuantepec. And now, at Mixtlan, they stood guard at the rugged passes to strike down the hated *teules*.

Yet there is always a chance that racial hatreds can be overcome, and a month after his interview with the President of Mexico Anthony Gambel stood at the threshold of Mixtlan. It was a town called Quitavaca, half buried in tropical foliage, its very streets overhung by the spreading limbs of mangoes beneath which shaded coffee trees grew.

The land reeked with the smell of rotting vegetation, the mangoes lay sour on the ground; and every day, as the great thunderstorms came on, it dripped and smoked in the heat. Little men in white garments prodded oxen across the fields or lounged beneath huge sombreros in the park. Long processions of countrymen came plodding into town, bringing their products to the ancient marketplace; and he exchanged polite greetings and nned their still faces Gambel recognized e different types.

Here were some with light skins and a ntle, kindly look, men who smiled when smiled and women without fear who re their dowry in coins about their cks. But among them stalked others of e swarthy Aztec stock, men with harsh, utal faces who barely spoke as they ssed and women who regarded him sul-lly. For, before the Spaniards had con-ered the City of Mexico, the fierce war-rs of the Aztec had overcome the Zapo-cs and stationed garrisons to collect ibute for Montezuma; and here, bred in d in, their descendants lived on, still nscious of the glory that was gone.

ACROSS the plaza at the *cuartel,* runty soldiers from the north held the native *paisanos* in control; and at e office of the *jefe politico* Anthony mbel appeared, with a letter from no s than Diaz himself. The *jefe* was gov-nor and military chief rolled in one. He d command of the district, with soldiers o enforce his will; but as he glanced at e signature of Porfirio Diaz he rose up d gave Gambel an embrace.

"Señor Gambel," he said, patting him ectionately on the back after the ancient panish custom, "I am honored to make ur acquaintance. A letter has preceded u, from Don Porfirio himself, request-g that we show you every courtesy. You ve only to state your wants. But I pe you are not planning, as others have ne, to enter the Forbidden Country of ixtlan. You are, indeed? Then the ints protect you!" And he crossed him-elf, though not too devoutly.

"Many thanks, Señor!" replied Gambel, for your friendly solicitude, which I am nfident comes from the heart. But hough you may not know it, I have gone nto another country ten times as forbid-en as this. I have penetrated into the terior of San Blas."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the *jefe,* brushing p his jet-black pompadour which had iven him the name of The Crow. "But hat is far from here. Yet now that you peak of it, I remember. There was an merican, like yourself, who came two ears ago with the purpose of entering Mixtlan—though I think he only sought for oil—and he also made mention of San Blas. But whatever his motive the reason he gave to me was that the Indians of Mixtlan were white."

"So I have heard," responded Gambel gravely. "And it was for that that I entered San Blas. But after all my sufferings, and the risk of my life, I discovered that the story was a myth. The White Indians were nothing but albinos—Indians lacking full pigmentation in the skin."

"I understand," bowed the *jefe,* "but will you tell me, my friend, why you Americans seek so diligently for White Indians. Have you no Indians, then, in your own country—or is it that you seek more whites?"

"No, neither," replied Gambel, noting the sly, meaning smile with which El Guervo accompanied his words. "If you will indulge me I shall be glad to explain. The Americans, as you know, are greatly interested in their southern neighbors, and especially in your beautiful country. For here, as you know, there are relics of ancient cities and of a civilization almost equal to our own. Here, too, ruled Montezuma over an empire that stretched from sea to sea; but the Indians in the United States are very simple and crude, many building no houses at all. It is for that reason we come here to Mexico, where the natives are descended from kings."

The swarthy cheeks of the Crow flushed with pride, for he himself had Indian blood; but he did not forget his point.

"It gives me pleasure," he said, "to talk with an American who is informed of the history of our country—and our fathers, indeed, were kings. But for twenty years now different foreigners have come to Quitavaca with the intention of entering Mixtlan. Some have expressed the hope that somewhere behind those mountains they would find deposits of petroleum. Others have mentioned the emeralds and gold which the natives sometimes bring here to trade. But this Señor Darlington, of whom I spoke before, spoke of nothing but White Indians—White Indians."

He smiled enigmatically, as if by implication he coupled the two together and saw through the motives of both, but Gambel did not let his face change.

"I know, Señor," he said, "that your time is very valuable. Even now others have come to see you. But since you mention the matter again I shall be glad to explain the reason for this search for White Indians."

"Their business can wait," replied the *jefe politico* indifferently; and lit a long, twisted cigar.

"In the United States," began Gambel, "we make a great study of Indians. Many books have been written on their customs and languages. Millions of dollars have been spent on museums. The reason is that our Indians are fast dying out or adopting the life of the whites. Now, I am an anthropologist, a scientist studying Indians, but my first expedition was into the mountains of Mexico, where I became acquainted with the traditions of your people. It is for that reason I come here to Quitavaca to inquire of the White Indians of Mixtlan.

"As you know, Señor, the early Mexicans were all sun worshipers. The great temple in Mexico City from which Cortes tore the wheel of gold was erected to Quetzalcoatl."

"Ah! You know the name!" cried the *jefe,* suddenly animated. "Kayzal-quatt was indeed an ancient god."

"He is worshiped yet," nodded Gambel. "Right over those mountains. That is why I wish to enter Mixtlan. But you, señor, are an educated man and I will explain my reasons further. In the scientific world a new school has arisen which contends that all gods are what we call culture heroes—great men, who have afterwards been worshiped. Yet to prove it is very difficult.

"But Quetzalcoatl is said by the Indians to have landed somewhere on this coast. He made his way to Cholula, where his great temple was built, and there for many years he taught the people to work metals, as they do exceptionally well to this day. Then he passed on to the east where on the shore of the Great Water he built a canoe and departed. Very well—we claim he was a man. And I have come here to prove it.

"The Indians of Mixtlan are pure natives, every one. No Spaniard has ever entered their country. Yet among them I have heard that there are white men with blue eyes, and hair as yellow as my own. Have you heard these stories, señor?"

"Yes, indeed!" replied the *jefe.* "It is true."

"Then here is my contention," went on Anthony. "Quetzalcoatl, the sun god, was a man with yellow hair. He landed on this coast not a thousand years ago, as all the Indians still tell. Then where, my friend, did these White Indians come from—unless they descended from him?"

"Ah! You do not know Indians!" shrugged the *jefe.* "No, no; they did not come from Kayzal-quatt!"

"Then from where?" demanded Gambel, and the *jefe* shrugged again, cynically.

"Who knows?" he said. "More than other bastard Indians, with hair as red as their shame? What man really knows his own father?"

"Yet this you must admit," countered Anthony. "No white man has entered their country."

"*Pues no!*" rapped back the *jefe.* "There are five men that I know of—and one, as I remember, had red hair. He was a Belgica engineer, a man of noble family which had sent him from home in disgrace, and he came here seeking petroleum. He, I know, entered Mixtlan; and he never came back—yet who can say he is dead? It is the law in Belgium that the title cannot pass until the death of every claimant is proved, and to recover his body two lawyers came down here with an offer of fifty thousand pesos. Porfirio Gonzales, the old Mexican who speaks their language and keeps a store on the edge of town, conveyed this offer to their chiefs; but the body was never returned. So either the man still lives, or the Indians, fearing the Government, are unwilling to admit his death. Perhaps the children are his!"

"Perhaps so," smiled Gambel, "but I prefer to believe they are veritable descendants of the sun. Is this Porfirio Gonzales still living?"

"He is," responded the *jefe,* "but it is useless to persuade him. No money will hire him to go back."

"Then he has been there?" inquired Anthony eagerly. "Can he tell me about Mixtlan?"

"Only so much," shrugged the *jefe,* "as a boy of ten would know, after he had lived in their mountains as a slave. He was taken a prisoner for this very purpose—to learn their language and help them in trade; but he was never permitted to visit their great valley or to go down and spy out the land. For fifty years and more he has kept a little store on the outskirts of the town and there, in exchange for gold and a green stone like an emerald, he sells them needles and fine cloth. Yet even so he is miserably poor."

"I must go and see this man," observed Gambel.

"Go, if you will," replied the *jefe,* "but do not blame me if by so doing you come to your death. For each of the five foreigners who lost their lives in Mixtlan placed their confidence in this same Gonzales."

"I will remember," promised Gambel, but he left the office smiling and made haste to seek out his man.

CHAPTER III

THE TEMPLE OF QUETZALCOATL

THERE is a gorge, a narrow *barranca,* cutting through the tropical forest that thrusts so hard on Quitavaca; and across it, swaying perilously, a bridge has been hung, leading on to the jungle beyond. In its depths a mountain stream rushes thunderously along between walls where long vines hang down, and at the east end of the bridge beneath a canopy of rustling palms the *tienda* of Gonzales stands. It is a long building of baked red bricks, overlaid with mossy tiles with a wide corridor down the front; and in a rawhide chair, combing out his long, white beard, Gambel found Don Porfirio dreaming.

He was an old man, over whom the years had passed lightly, for he had married the second time a young wife; and in the dwelling behind there was the sound of girlish voices where his daughters were washing out their hair. Gambel glimpsed them, eight maidens in a row, their black hair spread out in the sun, and then he turned to their father.

"Good day, sir!" he saluted. "I am Antonio Gambel, an American scientist and traveler. Have I the pleasure of addressing Señor Gonzales?"

"At your orders," replied the storekeeper, looking him over appraisingly; and arose to wave him to a chair.

"I have come," began Gambel, after speaking of the weather at the length which custom demands, "to see the green stones which you buy from the Indians. Do you offer them also for sale?"

"In truth, yes!" exclaimed Gonzales, scrambling hastily to his feet. "But the people of this country are too poor to buy them and strangers and tourists are few."

He entered the darkened doorway of his ancient store, which smelled of bats and musty cane, and after long and mysterious fumblings he returned with a hardwood tray on which some jewels glowed in the sun. They were stones such as Anthony had never seen before, but by their crystalline form allied to emeralds. He looked them over gravely, fingering their roughness doubtfully, and picked out two of the best.

"What price do you place on these?" he asked.

"Whatever the señor wishes," responded the storekeeper fawningly. "I do not know what they are worth. Perhaps a peso, perhaps more—I do not know."

"Nor do I know," smiled Anthony, "but because they are very curious I will give you five dollars for the two. Or if that is too little—more."

"*Bastante!*" cried Gonzales, showing his even, white teeth. "You are very generous, señor. I have also some quills of gold which I should like to sell, as the apothecary cheats me outrageously."

"Well, perhaps," agreed Gambel. "But I like the jewels better. Because the law, as you know, prohibits the shipping out of gold and my home is in the United States."

"Ah! *Los Estados Unidos!* I knew a gentleman from there. Were you acquainted with the Señor Darlington?"

"No," confessed Anthony. "My acquaintance is rather limited. Is he an American who came to Quitavaca?"

"Two years ago," responded the storekeeper. "He bought several quills of gold."

"Let me see your gold," nodded Gambel and the old man scuttled off again.

He came back smiling mysteriously, looking anxiously down the road which came to an end at his store; and then from a buckskin bag he brought out a handful of nuggets and quills half filled with fine gold. Gambel hefted them in his hand and then he asked the questions to which he had been leading up.

"From where does this placer gold come?"

"Ah, from a country *muy lejos*—very far behind those mountains which rise like a wall to the west. Have you never heard of Mixtlan?"

"But, yes," nodded Gambel. "It is the home of the ancient people who worship Quetzalcoatl, the sun god. Do they bring this gold to you?"

"At times," returned the storekeeper warily. "But who told you of the sun god, Quetzalcoatl?"

"I am a professor—a scientist," explained Anthony, "and I have traveled all over Mexico. I know many tribes of Indians, and all speak of Quetzalcoatl; though they call him by different names. He was the god with the white face who came from the West and taught the Indians how to live."

"In truth," observed Gonzales, after gazing at him long, "you have learned what few white men know. The Spaniards only laugh when we speak of our ancient gods—have you ever seen a temple to the sun?"

"In Cholula," answered Gambel, "there is a pyramid, very high, that was built by the sun god himself. And even yet it is said that the natives of that country have the secret of tempering copper. They were taught to work metals by Quetzalcoatl."

"Carai!" exclaimed Porfirio. "I have never met a professor, but you scientists are indeed very wise."

"Oh, no!" protested Anthony. "About Indians we know almost nothing. The poorest peon in that marketplace could tell me many things that never have been written in books."

"He could, indeed!" agreed Gonzales and sat meditating profoundly while Gambel waited patiently for him to speak.

"There is a temple," he said at last, "buried deep in this forest; but no white man has ever seen it. It was built long ago, to the sun god."

"I should like to visit it," observed Gambel inperturbably, though his heart suddenly leaped with joy. "But perhaps the natives would object."

"No," observed the storekeeper, "I think I could persuade them. Because now it is nothing but ruins."

"And could you hire them, for me, to help dig out these ruins? I should be glad to pay you well."

For a moment the blue eyes of Porfirio opened up and then once more they were veiled.

"I think so," he said, "if that is your business. I have heard that all professors study ruins."

"Well, not all," responded Antonio, "but I have studied many; and I always hire pure Indians to dig. So if you will engage me ten men, those who know most about it and would be careful not to injure the temple, we will begin the work at once. They shall buy all their provisions at your store."

"That is best," nodded Gonzales, his avaricious old eyes gleaming, "they rob them unmercifully in the town. How much will you pay them a day?"

"If they receive, as I hear, three *reales* a day, I shall be glad to pay them four."

"It is agreed!" beamed the storekeeper. "Only let me do the paying and I will hire none but the best."

"Old men," stipulated Gambel, "who respect the ancient temples. I shall leave it all to you, Don Porfirio."

THEY assembled in the morning, ancient laborers of the Zapotecs who had consented to accept Gonzales' wage; and if, as was more than likely, they received two *reales* instead of four, the remaining *reales* were well spent. Business picked up at the deserted store, Don Porfirio was all smiles, and Antonio bided his time. Never once did he mention Mixtlan.

A month went by and in the depths of the forest a broad clearing let in the sun. Huge stones were unearthed, each so carefully squared that they fitted without mortar or lime; and in a chamber beneath the pile an idol was discovered—the mild, familiar image of the sun god. But Gambel left it where it stood and soon, in twos and threes, strange Indians came gliding in to see. They went, and others came, looking first at the god and then at the yellow bearded white man; and one day as he worked Anthony spied three savage faces, quite different from all the rest, staring intently from the clearing's edge. They had come—the men of Mixtlan!

For hours they watched him work, apparently oblivious of their presence, concerned only with the record of his finds; and then, like furtive shadows, they stole down the passageway and stood in the presence of their god. The next day they were gone, but a few weeks later other savages came gliding from the jungle. They were naked, like the first, except for tiger skins over their shoulders and breach-clouts of native cotton; and about their arms hung broad bracelets of solid gold. But these men, unlike the first, who were low-browed and swarthy, had the mien and bearing of chiefs; and after watching Gambel at his work their leader advanced and held out his hand in greeting.

"Wano!" he said and Gambel shook hands with him and the two men who stood at his back. Then, following the Indian custom, he offered them food and gave them tobacco to smoke. They blew little puffs to the four points of the compass, to the Sun and to Mother Earth, and squatted to watch his labors; and when, with his men, he filed back through the jungle they followed on confidently to the store. Each bore in his hand a short, stout bow, with a quiver of arrows behind; and Gambel thrilled when they talked to hear a jargon so primitive that it sounded like the quacking of ducks. But Porfirio, when he saw them, turned pale.

Gonzales was a man of fair skin, inherited with his blue eyes from some ancient Visigoth of Spain; and it was because of these features, and his fair hair when he was young, that he had been kidnapped by the Indians of Mixtlan. But when, as he grew up, he developed none of the qualities which they had looked for in a god, the Indians with great reluctance had brought him back, though they required him to serve them still. At sight of his former masters he trembled and grew pale and the leader spoke to him sternly.

"He commands me," interpreted Gonzales, as the chief stood waiting, "to ask you where you came from. This is Ishtli, a war captain of Mixtlan."

"I came," said Gambel, pointing, "from a country far to the north where in winter the ground is white with snow. My home is in Nuevo York, on the shore of the Eastern Sea."

The storekeeper, for the first time since Gambel had known him, spoke slowly in the duck-language of Mixtlan; and Ishtli, after considering, replied.

"He asks," continued Porfirio, "from what country your fathers came, and whether it was east or west."

"They came," replied Antonio, "from a land across the waters, very far away to the east."

" 'Good', he says, 'but how did they come, since the waters are very wide?' "

"In a canoe with wings," answered Gambel, who knew the story well, "and they paddled with two oars, backward."

"Hah!" cried the Indians, clapping their hands to their mouths in astonishment as they heard Gonzales' reply; and they turned and regarded Anthony strangely. Then, one after the other, they bowed to the ground and glided across the bridge into the forest.

CHAPTER IV

A CHILD OF THE SUN

AS WEEKS passed by and as no word came from the west, no invitation to cross the mountains to Mixtlan, a slow fever began to burn in Gambel's breast. He had laid his plans well to win over these Indians, and all had come about as he hoped. They had visited his excavations and carried the news to their people. A deputation of chiefs had come, but though they had bowed their heads as if to a god, their visitations had ceased. And since the day when Ishtli had appeared at his store, Gonzales had been silent and aloof. In some way Anthony's plans had gone wrong.

"Don Porfirio," he said at last after many days had passed, "for what reason are you always *triste?* Since the Indians from Mixtlan came to make us their visit your face is always sad."

"It is my daughters," confided the storekeeper after a moment of crafty silence. "I have eight, all old enough to marry; but how can I provide them with a dowry? Only for that I should be very happy."

"Your daughters are very beautiful," flattered Gambel, "and that alone will bring them husbands. But if you cannot be happy without the dowries, even that perhaps can be arranged."

"In what way?" inquired Gonzales, after a silence. "Will the money spring up from the ground?"

"Even so," returned Antonio, "if you speak the right words, as Ali Baba had only to say: Sesame!"

"I do not understand," answered Porfirio, uneasily. "What words then must I say?"

"You must tell the people of Mixtlan that I am a good man, and that I wish to visit their country."

"Aha!" breathed Gonzales. "And why?"

"To see the White Indians who live there."

The old man laid his finger along the side of his nose and regarded Antonio roguishly.

"I have heard," he said, "that you are like the rest—that what you really seek is petroleum."

"And what," inquired Gambel, "would I do with petroleum? Is it something that can be brought out, like gold?"

"Quien sabe!" shrugged Porfirio. "But the Señor Darlington——"

"Enough! I am not Señor Darlington! But Don Porfirio, when the chiefs came to ask you, did you not tell them that I, too, sought for oil? Do not answer, for I know that you did. You have betrayed me—you are not my friend."

"Ah, no, no, Don Antonio! I am all the more your friend! Because the poor Señor Darlington died."

"What is that to me?" stormed Gambel. "Did I say I was afraid to die? No! I told you, señor, that I wished to enter Mixtlan—and you told the Indians a lie!"

"But, señor," pleaded Gonzales, "have you not heard of their law, that no white man can leave their country? Would I be your true friend if I let you go up that trail down which no man returns? I can get you in, yes, because they let all men in. But, Don Antonio, you would never come back."

"That is nothing!" retorted Anthony. "Who is there to mourn for me? And when men are born with yellow hair like mine they have no fear of death. It is a gift from Quetzalcoatl, the sun god."

"Perhaps so," mused Porfirio, after gazing at him curiously. "In my boyhood I also had yellow hair, and in those days I also feared nothing. But since it has turned white—" He sighed.

"Are you afraid now, of death?" inquired Gambel.

"No señor!" answered Gonzales stoutly. "I am an old man, and soon must go. But my wife is still young; and, since I married the second time, my three sons will have nothing to do with me. Who then would provide for her, and my poor, unmarried daughters, if I died before my time?"

"I will care for them—all of them," promised Anthony, "if you will go with me into Mixtlan."

"Por Dios, you are generous," quavered Porfirio, "but do you know how I should die then? Instead of passing away in bed with my family around me and the priest to pray my soul into heaven, the Aztecas of Mixtlan would offer me to their war god—they would tear out my heart for Huitzil Opochtli!"

"The Aztecs!" repeated Gambel. "Do they still live in Mixtlan and offer up human sacrifices? Then come—I will pay you well. For each of your daughters I will leave a thousand pesos, so she can marry into the *sangre legitima;* and for your wife, if you do not come back, I will leave five thousand more. Only go with me over the mountains, where I can see these ancient Aztecs!"

"But what will it profit you?" protested Gonzales, "if they lay you on the sacrificial stone? Are all you gringos crazy?"

"No!" answered Anthony, with withering scorn. "We are brave—that is why we succeed. We are not afraid to die. But you, like an old goat, sit wagging your beard while your daughters remain unwed. Do you wish them to die old maids?"

"God forbid!" breathed Porfirio, crossing himself fervently for courage. "But my wife? She loves me still."

"To be sure!" agreed Gambel. "And if you come back with many riches she will say that Don Porfirio is a man. But if you sit here, day by day, and no one comes to trade; then how can you keep her love? Because women, like men, must eat—they cannot live on love alone."

"You are a strange man, Don Antonio," responded the storekeeper at last, "but what you say is true. My hot blood is getting thinned and I am too easily content. I will speak of this offer to Maria."

HE STRODE back into the inner court, where his wife and her daughters passed their days in monotonous seclusion, and Gambel listened breathlessly. To rouse this old man, who alone could assist him, he had offered him a fortune in gold. He had taunted him for his apathy over the fate of his daughters, whom he loved with an old man's pride. But most of all he had appealed to his love for his dark eyed young wife. Now he went inside to confide to Maria this chance to risk his life for her sake.

There was a wail, a chorus of shrieks and a chatter of women's voices, all talking and none listening to Porfirio; then they rushed to the inner door to gaze out with horror at the man who had made this strange offer. Did he wish then, to kill Porfirio? Let him go if he would into the country behind the mountains; let him die, like the others, seeking gold; but their beloved *papacito* should never lose his life to gain for them the gringo's gold! So in ceaseless repetition they babbled on and on, making much of their *querido papá;* and as the noise of their protests died down into an argument Anthony Gambel smiled and went home.

The eldest daughter was twenty-six. In four years—without a dowry—she would be a spinster or the wife of some *pobre,* doomed to work in the fields like a slave. But Don Porfirio and Maria were of the blue blood of Spain, and with a *dote* all could marry well. And while the youngest of his daughters had stuck out her tongue at the gringo the oldest had looked back, and sighed. Gambel had taken that backward glance as a sign.

In the morning, with many apologies, the old storekeeper, explained that his family all loved him too well. Rather than see him ride away to such a terrible death, all his daughters had sworn to stay unwed. And it was best, for they would both be killed. In the passes of the mountains the fierce Aztecas lurked like devils, ready to rise up and surround their victims. It was easy to go in—all the trails were left open—but no outlander ever came back alive.

"Very well," nodded Gambel. "I will go in alone, then. For I am a man whose fathers were warriors—they crossed the Great Waters to fight. My hair is still red and I am not afraid to die. I am sorry your beard has turned white."

"Ah, no, *amigo!*" protested Porfirio. "You quite misunderstand me. I am a man not afraid of death. Did I not offer my family to make this journey with you? But none of my women would consent."

"That is because they are women," answered Anthony contemptuously. "You have lived among them too long. But my work takes me everywhere among the wildest of savages and never have I turned back from fear. I have a rifle which you have seen—without hammer or trigger—yet it will shoot like the tapping of a woodpecker. Will the Mixtecas tie me down to some stone?"

"But yes!" declared Gonzales. "Every man is a devil. All they wish for is death in battle. If you killed a hundred warriors the rest would press upon you until at last they took you alive. There is no one they hate like the *teules*—the white strangers who have conquered all Mexico. And when they have taken you, unharmed, they will lay you across the stone and cut out your heart for their war god."

"The war god!" repeated Gambel. "I thought they were worshipers of the sun."

"In the great valley—yes. At the Place of The Eagles, which is called Quanahuac, they have built a great temple to Quetzalcoatl. The people there are mild, and many have blue eyes which shows that they came from the sun; but in the mountains all about there live no one but the Aztecs, whom not even Porfirio Diaz could conquer. Once he sent in a colonel with eight hundred soldiers to force their way into the country, but the Mixtecas fell upon them and killed every one, except a very few that escaped. Are you a greater man than Diaz?"

"No, indeed!" disclaimed Anthony. "But Diaz was not there or the soldiers would never have been beaten. Did not Don Porfirio at the battle of Puebla defeat the French army alone? This colonel was only half a man."

"*Quien sabe!*" shrugged Gonzales. "But Don Porfirio is very brave. Have you noticed that we have the same name?"

"I have, indeed!" smiled Gambel, "but there the resemblance ceases, for you listen to no one but your women. Can a woman tell her husband to go? He might think she did not love him!"

"*Madre de Dios!*" muttered Porfirio. "Sometimes I think I will go."

"Do so," promised Anthony, "and I will leave here for your daughters eight thousand pesos as a gift. And if you do not return I will deposit at the bank five thousand pesos more for your wife. It shall be hers at the end of one year."

"By all the saints!" exclaimed Gonzales in despair. "I cannot make up my mind! For when you are talking it is all very simple, but Maria will not let me go."

"Listen, *amigo,*" reasoned Gambel, "if the Indians kill you then who would purchase their needles? Who would buy the fine white cloth that you get for their priests and the blue dyes that never fade? Did they kill you when they had you before?"

"But you!" cried the old man. "Have you lost all love of life? Did not all the other white men die? Then why, my friend, do you torture me with this offer? Give me a reason and I will go gladly!"

"*Muy bien,*" smiled Anthony. "Our bargain is made. Very soon we will be on the trail. I have a guardian spirit which puts my heart above fear. Wherever I go I return. It is a gift from the sun, whom my ancestors worshiped, and who has colored my hair and your own. I am a child of the sun and no Indian can kill me. I am not afraid. Will you go?"

"I will go," agreed Porfirio and from the corridor beyond, a listening woman screamed.

CHAPTER V

THE DANCE OF THE FIREFLIES

TO THE west of Quitavaca, beyond the palms and the dripping jungle and the wooded ranges of hills, there rises a line of blue incredibly high and straight—the mountains that shut in Mixtlan. At evening, when a haze rises up from the smoking valleys like a veil drawn across the sky, they turn to purple and mauve; at dawn they show deep cañons and jagged precipices; but to the eye of Don Porfirio they were black as hell itself, the home of Aztec devils and sorcerers.

It was a priest of Mixtlan, whom he had offended by his marriage, who had brought this curse of daughters on Porfirio. For by his first wife he had had three sons, but though he loved Doña Maria she bore him nothing but daughters. In the bitterness of his departure, when with wailing women looking on he loaded the *cargas* on his four stout mules, the old man, behind his hand, whispered his troubles to Anthony and told him the name of the priest. It was Malinal, the high priest of the war god, who lived at Cohuatepec, just over the peak.

"He is a devil!" he hissed. "He has sold his soul. At night he talks with the owl. He it was who wished to kill me when the cacique at Quanahuac ordered the people to send me home. Malinal is his name. *Que diablo!*"

He threw the last of his hitches and while Gambel pulled them tight the old man took up the slack. Though he was sixty he was a good *arriero* still.

"Thus it was," he explained behind the pack, where Maria would not sense what he said. "At first Malinal wished to have me killed. But when Chimal Popoca, the cacique at Quanahuac, gave orders for my release, Malinal cast me under a spell. He made me fall in love with a Mixteca woman whom I married and who bore me three sons. But she died and the three sons were undutiful to their father, so I wished to marry again. It was Maria—my sweetheart, my soul—see now how she weeps for my going! Then it was that Malinal came over the mountains and gazed at me—and her! He did no more, and then he went away—but all of our children were girls!"

"But they at least are dutiful," observed Anthony. "See how they cling to their mother. And when you come back, with a great reward, all their kisses will be for you. Is all ready now to go?"

"All is done," sighed Porfirio, "except the hardest task of all, to bid farewell to Maria. Will you start the mules over the bridge?"

He stood back trembling, but Gambel shook his head.

"No," he said, "it is better to wait, for they will miss their master's voice. Perhaps on the bridge one might fall, and that would be a sign of bad luck."

"Bad luck! Do not name it!" muttered the old man in his beard. "Something tells me I shall never return."

"And something tells me that you will return with great riches," returned Anthony. "Never before has my heart been so strong. I could laugh, except for your family. But remember, Don Porfirio, all women are weak. It is the man's part to do and decide. So kiss them quickly now and tell them to go and pray. Then you and I will cross the bridge."

He stepped aside grimly and, Don Porfirio, as grim, kissed his children one by one. But when he came to his wife he burst into tears and Maria threw her arms about his neck.

"*Bastante!*" broke in Anthony, putting a hand on his shoulder, and Porfirio raised his head.

"Go inside the house and pray for me," he commanded; and reluctantly they went away. Then, taking his bell mule, he led the way across the bridge which trembled and swayed with their weight; and as the old *mula* took the lead, the young *machos* followed her and so all passed over unharmed.

"Did I not tell you!" cried Anthony. "We have crossed the bridge in safety. Now lead on. We are children of the sun."

DON PORFIRIO looked back at his long house beneath the palms and turned his face to the west. With his own eyes he had seen the eight bags of silver pesos, each as heavy as a woman could lift, laid away in the vault for his daughters. Beside them lay five others, to go to Maria at his death, or to him on his safe return. All the town had come to see, the young gentlemen were making eyes at his *ninas*, his brave deed would never be forgotten—and yet he turned away with a sigh. Life was sweet there beneath the rustling palms.

Through the aisles of the matted forest, where lianas like huge grapevines made a network high up in the trees, they followed the old Indian trail. Where undergrowth blocked their way they hacked through with machetes, and as the sun was sinking low they came out of the jungle into a country of barren hills and rocks. And there, being wearied by their long journey through the heat, they made camp and cooked a supper of the best.

Two mules of their four were loaded with provisions, another with bottled drinks and soda-pop to delight their savage hosts; but the last mule of all was laden with presents to buy the good will of the chiefs. Here were silks and fine handkerchiefs, French candies and rare liqueurs; and to cheer the old man's heart Anthony opened a bottle of cognac and poured him a generous cup.

"*Salud!*" he saluted. "A journey well started is half done. And now that we can see the hills, show me the way, Don Porfirio, to this country where no man goes."

"They go," corrected Porfirio, "but they do not come back. It is like the lion's den in the fable, when he pretended to be sick and called on all the animals to visit him. But the fox, who was wise, cast his eyes on the tracks and found them all pointing one way."

"Prudent fox!" observed Anthony. "But we are like those heroes who dared to beard the lion in his den. Look, here is wine, to warm the lion's heart; here is sodawater, to explode and amuse him; and here in my medicine chest I have many potent remedies to heal the ailing and sick. Have another *copita* of this golden liqueur and show me the trail to Mixtlan."

"It goes yonder," and Gonzales pointed, his palm to the sky, "over that mountain which seems so low. But when you have topped it two days will be gone and our journey just begun. Beyond it lies a country too desolate for men to live, given over entirely to ants. I assure you, for twenty leagues, there is nothing to be seen but their mud nests, rising like huts. If you strike one a sharp blow or stumble across it in the night-time it falls to nothing into a pit; and there a million ants will pick your bones white, for you will never climb out alive."

"Very well," nodded Gambel. "So much for the valley of ants. And from there on what do we find?"

"A great desert of thorns where nothing can live, except wild hogs called *javalinas*. They travel in bands, sometimes numbering several hundred, and if one of them is injured and gives its loud cry the others will charge in and rend you. The natives fear to kill them. But if you escape their attacks it will be only to fall the victim of countless millions of fleas. Only by traveling at night and keeping always at a trot is it possible to come through alive, and our mules will be bit to the blood."

"And then?" inquired Anthony. "The pass?"

"High mountains!" shrilled Porfirio. "So high that it always rains and the natives wear grass capes to shed the downpour. And in caverns beneath the rocks there live people who always hide, because the Aztecs brutally kill them. There are cliffs there so high that they cut off the sun and narrow defiles above which are balanced rocks. But, because we have sent word and received permission to enter, the guard will let us pass."

"Ah!" smiled Gambel. "Then what what more do you want? Except, perhaps, one more little drink."

He poured out a nightcap for his downcast companion, who already had stretched out by the fire; and soon, under the stars, they lay sleeping side by side, while the mule bells jangled near.

DAWN came, and with many groanings the mules submitted to their packs and started ahead down the trail; nor did they cross the mountains until two days had passed, although they had seemed so near. Hills and forests intervened and not a human being appeared or made a smoke in that desolate land. It was deserted, except for the wary deer and game which trotted away in surprise; and on the third day they entered the Valle de Las Hormigas, where the ant nests rose by the score.

To try one, Anthony struck it a blow from his mule and the paperlike structure collapsed into its pit, while the ants came pouring forth. But they gave off an angry odor which roused others down the wind and after that he was content to hurry on. From early dawn till late at night they scurried across the plains avoiding the colonies of ants, until at last a high ridge delivered them from the pests and they were able to throw off their packs.

Then over broken country they toiled on for days and days until Anthony was hopelessly lost, but the old man kept on, traveling by landmarks he knew, until he came to the Valley of Fleas. Yet here, except occasionally, their numbers proved a fable; and the *javalinas,* too, let them pass. Only the switching of tails and the vicious stamp of feet told of the suffering their pack mules endured and, as they mounted the heights beyond, the swarming fleas let go and fell back half frozen into the dust.

That night from the slope of the mighty Cohua Mountains they looked back across the desert which lay at their feet, and Don Porfirio sighed. In a little valley just below, a thousand huge fireflies carried on their dance of death; and as one, passing near, suddenly put out its light the old man shook his head.

"They know," he said, "each *luciernaga* is the spirit of one who is dead. And now, when they see us on the trail to Mixtlan, they put out their lanterns for a sign."

"Would you turn back to Quitavaca, then?"

"Not I," answered Porfirio. "For I have sworn by all the saints never to fail you, wherever you go. But if in the United States there is some woman you love, or some little one who awaits your return——"

"There is no one," said Gambel. "If I should die tomorrow no woman would shed a tear."

"Pero no!" protested Gonzales. "There is one that I know of, though in truth she has small cause to love you. But little Rosita, my youngest child, came running to say she would pray for you."

"Then to repay her," smiled Anthony, "I will make you a promise. Within the year her *papá* shall return. But you must keep a stout heart when, as soon must occur, the Aztecas come out to meet us. Speak boldly in their language, telling the chiefs I am Don Antonio, whose fathers worshiped the sun. Tell them also I have no fear, for no Indian can kill me while I can kill many of them. If any doubt my word I will make magic before them, or fight any four of them alone. All I want is to see their cacique."

"But the Aztecs," objected Porfirio, "are very jealous of Chimal Popoca, Smoking Shield. He worships the sun, but these in the mountains have gone back to their ancient war gods."

"Nevertheless, I will go among them and make my way to Quanahuac, because Chimal Popoca has given me permission. And perhaps he will send a guard, to usher me to his city. But if not, I will go in alone."

"Not alone," answered Porfirio, "for I will be with you. And already they have seen our fire, so now we cannot go back. But I fear that tomorrow we shall die."

He pointed as he spoke to the high summit of the Cohuas, over which they must make their way; and, like fireflies in the distance, Gambel saw a succession of arrows, writhing up like flaming snakes into the sky.

"They are fire arrows," explained Gonzales, "which the watchers on the heights shoot up to warn those below. Many times when I was a boy I saw them, like the fireflies which circle this valley below. But have you noticed how each arrow turns and dies?”

Anthony watched, for he knew the old man's belief in signs, and at last he gave a shout.

“There went one,” he said, “that made its circle to the ground.”

“But only one!” replied Porfirio sadly.

“If one of us comes back it shall be you,” promised Antonio. “I will do that for Rosita and her prayers.”

“Ah, my little ones—my Maria,” the old man sighed. “Even now they are praying for my life. But who can tell what will happen tomorrow?”

CHAPTER VI

MALINAL

LONG and merrily the circling fireflies jigged their macabre dance of death but as the sky paled in the east they put out their lanterns and Porfirio caught up his mules. A cold wind drew down the cañon as they turned their faces towards the heights, where the fire arrows had leaped like writhing snakes; heavy mists mantled the peaks and closed in as they mounted; but still with reluctant steps the pack train plodded on and Porfirio thwacked the laggards from behind. Only now he cursed them no more.

In the lead, to guide the way and help those that fell, Anthony Gambel rode his mouse-colored mule; but the rifle on his saddle hung loose in its scabbard and his shirt was half open in front. Not even Gonzales knew of the pistols beneath his *camisa*, so carefully were the gun slings hidden; but in a battle he would be armed with a six-shooter in each hand as if by some magic power. For in his warrior's code there was but one way to die—the Vikings had gone down fighting.

They toiled up deep ravines on whose water-worn rocks the sun had never shone. Mules fell on the slippery boulders and groaned at each step as they struggled through the drizzly rain. Then, as they gained the first heights and the clouds fell behind them, they took a winding trail towards the pass. The air was keen and thin, their flanks pumped like bellows as they paused at each turn to look back; but behind them, inexorably, their master flogged them on and they turned to their labor with deep grunts.

Up a pass so long and winding that it seemed to have no end they fought their way towards the rim of the beyond, and suddenly in the mud Anthony spied a single footprint, the toes spreading wide apart. Here some savage had passed, and where one had left his footprint a hundred might have gone without a sign. He threw off his poncho and shook out his yellow locks, and in an instant men rose up all about him.

They were naked but for a breechclout and the Mexican-tiger skin which each warrior had slung over his shoulders, and they stood like wild animals at gaze. Beneath their bristling black hair their searching eyes gleamed wickedly; arrows were set to their short, heavy bows; and each man at his belt had a long knife, almost a sword, and a copper ball on the end of a club. For a minute they stood set, as if waiting some signal, and Anthony threw up his hand.

“Wano!” he cried in the Indian greeting; and Gonzales began to shout from behind. The mules stood bunched and staring, too tired to stampede, and Porfirio came up on the run. Then in the deep, guttural duck-language he began a long oration, pointing to Anthony with deferential respect. There was a silence, and from the band a warrior stepped forth, holding a peeled white wand, tipped with green. It was Ishtli, whom Gambel had seen in the jungle when he came to view the temple of the sun.

What he said, Don Porfirio interpreted sentence by sentence, and Anthony listened calmly.

“Tell the stranger,’ said Isthtli, “that I come from Chimal Popoca, the High Priest and Ruler of Mixtlan. This wand is a symbol of his power. I have been sent with these warriors to escort him through the country, where many will be eager to slay him; but let him think once more whether he will not turn back, for we know that his errand is evil. He has come to spy out our land. If he enters he can never return.”

“Tell the messenger,” answered Anthony, “that I am Don Antonio, who claim my lineage from the sun. I am sorry if they think that my errand is evil, but I will show them that my heart is good. I come to heal the sick, to cause the lame to walk, to bring presents for the cacique and his chiefs. As for those who wish to kill me, I am not afraid, for no Indian can take my life. With this gun I can protect myself, and by calling on my magic I can strike an army dead, though my ways are ways of peace. I will go in—let the messenger lead on."

Porfirio interpreted, word for word, and Ishtli stood for a moment, his shrewd eyes fixed on Anthony. He was a tall, handsome man with a massive, leonine head; and, as Gambel saw his shoulders and the blue of his eyes, it came over him that here was a white man. Yet his skin was dark, his bristling hair was coarse and wiry and he regarded him with savage scorn.

"Tell the stranger," he said to Gonzales, "that we know his purpose well; and if he enters he shall never return. Others have come here before, against the will of our people, and every one has perished. Let him consider and turn back now."

"I will enter," answered Anthony grimly and Porfirio crossed himself again. Then, with the guard all about, they toiled up the last slope until they came to the summit of the pass. Muttering a prayer to the saints, Gonzales looked back at the murk which hung over his distant home, but up in front Don Antonio spurred forward eagerly to gaze at the Forbidden Land. Long slopes and wooded ridges led down into a fairyland of white cliffs and broad, verdant valleys, sleeping peacefully in the shadows of craggy peaks. For the mountains on which they stood struck a circle about Mixtlan, cutting it off from the ocean beyond.

YET something on the wind, or perhaps its cool breath, suggested the proximity of the sea; and as Anthony sensed its nearness it came over him suddenly that there he would make his escape. There, despite their guarded passes, he might win to the sea and sail away as the sun-god had gone. Or, failing, he might live here always, since already he was a savage at heart. He turned quickly, and Ishtli was smiling.

"Tell the stranger," he said to Gonzales, "that he can never escape. Will he turn back or go down to his death?"

"I will go down," returned Anthony, smiling back, and Ishtli led the way. But now from his shoulders he unslung a stiff, round shield and held it in front of his body; his men took spare arrows in their hands; and at last at a rocky place there was the honk of a conch shell and every bush gave up its man. They rose suddenly, in a great circle, swarthy men with unkempt hair and bows with set arrows in their hands; and Gambel knew by their faces they were Aztecas.

Their noses were huge and humped, like an eagle's beak; their mouths were wide and grinning; and in their eyes, beneath their tangled, unwashed hair, there shone a rude hatred of the foreigner. Over their shoulders, instead of tiger skins, they wore hides of the shaggy bears which inhabited those frozen heights; and in the lead in a black robe there stood an Aztec priest, a knife of black obsidian in his hand.

"That is Malinal!" hissed Porfirio, clutching frantically at Gambel's arm. "The devil who made my children all girls. And with that knife he cuts out men's hearts!"

Anthony answered him with a smile, but for the first time in his life he felt the cold clutch of fear. Malinal had raised his knife and as it flashed against the sky the Aztecas gave vent to their war cry.

"*Ah, hah, hah!*" they yelled, suddenly brandishing their long war clubs; and to add to the din a dozen huge conch shells began to bray and roar. No voice could be heard above the deafening chorus of whoops and beaten shields and echoing conchs, but when the noise was at its height Malinal lowered his knife and instantly the uproar was stilled. Then he stepped forth and in the sudden silence began an impassioned harangue.

"He says," interpreted Porfirio, "that you and I must be killed, because we have entered the Forbidden Land."

"And what says Ishtli?" asked Anthony.

"He says he has orders from Chimal Popoca to escort us to Quanahuac."

Ishtli closed his short speech and held up his wand, but the Aztecas did not give way.

"He says," went on Porfirio as Malinal began to shout, "that he has come to cut out your heart."

"Tell him to come on, then," challenged

Anthony, whipping out his rifle, "and I will feed his carcass to the dogs."

He stepped down off his mule and advanced a few steps and all the Aztecs but Malinal drew back. He stood, his old back humped, his toothless jaws yammering, his gleaming stone knife raised threateningly; and with the swiftness of light Gambel snapped up his gun and fired at the trembling blade. A dozen glittering fragments went flashing through the air as the obsidian was shattered by the bullet; but Malinal, still clutching the handle, raved on. Then looking up suddenly, he saw that the blade was gone and that the men behind him had fled.

"Come on and fight me!" dared Gambel, striding boldly out to meet him, and the old priest shuffled malevolently towards him; but before they came together Ishtli sprang in between them and held up his peeled white wand. Malinal stepped aside, still shouting his curses, but with leonine good nature the tiger soldiers filed past him as they would past a yapping dog.

"He is a devil!" pronounced Porfirio, crossing himself for the hundredth time; but Anthony looked back and smiled.

CHAPTER VII

THE WAR GOD'S TEMPLE

THE road into the Unknown Land led down a smoky cañon where charcoal burners, hardly human, charred wood in closed pits for the braziers of the cities below. Rumors had fled on before, bearing news of their approach, and every hovel and village was deserted. Only the dogs remained behind, to rush out with bared teeth at the strangers whose scent they had caught; and club as they would it was almost impossible for the guard to beat them off. It was as if the savage hate of their Aztec masters had communicated itself to these curs, and at the third village they encountered, Ishtli turned boldly in and occupied the house of the chief.

This was larger than the rest, a spacious, flat-roofed structure made of squared stones set in lime; and over the braziers that they found there the tiger soldiers boiled strips of meat which they ate with parched corn, boiled in milk. That they were veterans was made evident by the thorough manner in which they foraged for goat's milk and eggs, and the grim captain, Ishtli, paid no more heed to the skulking inhabitants than he did to their yelling dogs. Guards were set and the strangers' baggage safely stored in the big main room, and then, as the captain squatted down by the fire, Anthony made the first advance to win his friendship.

From one well filled pack he fetched out a box of candy, neatly wrapped in bright French foil; and after Ishtli had accepted it, Gambel brought out more bonbons, which he had Porfirio give to the men. Silk handkerchiefs were distributed with a prodigal hand and to top off the evening Anthony called for the soda-pop, that sure way to the savage heart. But when Gonzales uncapped it they exhibited no surprise, drinking it off with the greatest aplomb. Somewhere, at some time, they had visited civilization and become familiar with the white man's miracles, and in the blue eyes of Ishtli there was a shrewd, appraising smile which left Gambel vaguely uneasy. Only one of his numerous possessions earned more than a passing glance and that was his special rifle.

"Where is the hammer?" he asked, working his thumb for a sign as Anthony put it into his hands; and Porfirio responded in Mixtecan.

"It has none," he boasted. "It is a magic rifle, which shoots only when my master wills. And whatever he shoots at he kills."

Ishtli shrugged his shoulders doubtfully, searching breech and lock alike for some sign of a hidden release; but the gunsmith had set the trigger within the guard itself, where at a touch it would fly into place. Seek as he would, the wily savage could find no sign of it and he passed the gun back in disgust.

"Tomorrow," he said, "we shall see."

And Anthony knew then that his trial had begun.

But in all San Blas there had not been a native who could master the mystery of this rifle. It had been made to order at a great arms factory as a protection against savage treachery. A bolt locked the action and in the hands of an Indian, Gambel's weapon could not be used against him; but when he picked it up and released the secret spring a trigger leaped miraculously into place. As fast as he wished, sixteen shots could be fired, and he had practiced until he could shoot to a hair. So in the morning, when he felt the eyes of Ishtli fixed upon him, he answered his gaze with a smile.

They had come down from the frozen heights to a broad valley between high cliffs, whose white walls reflected the heat of the sun; and in deep caves, where softer strata had fallen away, macaws and parrots dwelt by the thousands. Flying always in pairs they poured in and out, waking the echoes with their raucous outcries; and at the approach of the party they flowed out in a gorgeous cascade of red and yellow and green. But, though he watched them, the crafty Ishtli did not point out one to shoot until a single pair came winging by. Then with a jerk of his wand he made the pantomime of shooting a gun and Anthony whipped out his rifle. But quick as he was, the mouse-colored mule was quicker, and it shied before he could fire.

Ishtli laughed as Gambel hastily lowered his gun to grab at the bridle reins; and the tiger clad soldiers, though the gifts had softened their hate, regarded his discomfiture with broad grins.

"Shoot these!" signaled Ishtli as another pair winged by, but Anthony shook his head.

"Tell him," he said to Porfirio, "that the parrots are too near. I will shoot that big eagle on the cliff."

He pointed to a bald eagle which, perched above its nest, looked down on the valley far below; and Ishtli nodded eagerly. Gambel raised his sights carefully and at the crack of the rifle the great bird let go and dropped, but as he struck against the cliff his mate sprang from her nest and flew away, straight over their heads. Scarcely a moment had elapsed and yet, without seeming to load, he shot her down in midair. She came hurtling to earth with a mighty thud not a hundred feet from the trail, and Ishtli clapped his hand to his mouth to express his admiration and astonishment. Even Porfirio was astounded and the soldiers, from hostile grins, suddenly burst into laughing shouts.

Never again would Anthony make two quicker or luckier shots. The fates had been with him that day. And despite their entreaties he put up his gun and shook his head at their clamorings. He had won their respect, at least, for killing was their business, and Ishtli nodded grimly.

"He shoots well," he said to Porfirio; and the tiger men strode on, smiling.

They were, as Anthony could see, a picked body of soldiers, taller and stronger than the runty Aztecas, and in each countenance there was reflected the rugged confidence of their chief and his contempt for the natives that they passed. Every man now wore a mantle of white, native cotton which they laid aside when they stripped for battle, and they swung down the road as fast as the mules could trot until they came within sight of a town. It was larger than the rest and above it towered a pyramid from whose summit there rose puffs of black smoke.

"This is Cohuatepec, where I was raised," stated Porfirio. "And that is the temple of the war god."

"Of Huitzil Opochtli?" demanded Gambel eagerly; and Gonzales shrugged and nodded.

"And Malinal!" he added significantly. "That smoke is to summon the people."

"I see," replied Anthony and, drawing out his rifle, he thrust in two loaded cartridges.

THE captain shouted an order and with military promptness the tiger soldiers threw off their mantles. Then, tucking them under their belts, they tightened their bow strings and struck up a wild, barbaric chant. Dogs and children came forth to meet them and from the summit of the temple a great drum pulsed and boomed. The streets filled and emptied again and then, in the central square, Gambel saw the mob massed against them. But Ishtli strode on arrogantly, holding the wand of Chimal Popoca high up for all to see; and the people gave way until the little procession had come to the middle of the plaza.

Then from the platform of the temple the huge cylindrical drum set up a louder roar. Black-robed priests came pouring out from their underground rooms like ants whose nest has been struck, and above the thunder of the drum a savage cry arose which was taken up by the crowd.

"They are saying: 'Kill the strangers!'" interpreted Porfirio; and his face was as white as his beard.

Ishtli unslung the short war club which he carried on his hip, made of a heavy copper ball attached to a stick, and as the mob pressed in he shouted a sudden order, then raised his club and struck. In an instant every tiger soldier had snatched his own weapon and without the least compassion or respect for woman or priest they beat the yelling Aztecs back. Another order rang out and in a compact wedge they fought their way to the temple steps.

Mules and men alike were forced up the broad stairs by the pressure of the seething mob but, having set the temple behind him, Ishtli turned upon the populace and drove them furiously back. Then, mounting up higher and holding his wand aloft, he spoke in warning tones to the crowd. But hardly had he ended when, from the mass of priests above, Malinal himself stepped forth. He was dressed in a robe of somber black, and at his back, as he advanced, followed a double row of priests each bearing a long staff tipped with feathers. The gorgeous plumes waved about him like tropical palms, some green, some yellow, some red; and as he came to a halt, lifting his hand for silence, the turbulent multitude was stilled.

Anthony looked on almost in awe, for in the full panoply of his office he had taken on a dignity almost regal; but when with angry barkings the old priest pointed at him, he realized his sinister power. He was a man born to rule, to sway men to his will; and, having met with defeat at the summit of the pass, his voice trembled with vindictive spite. When he paused after a shouted question and the people answered back, Porfirio spoke fearfuly in Gambel's ear.

"He has sworn," he said, "by the left limb of the sacred bird that you shall never pass this spot alive. He says you are a devil who have taken this form to deceive those who worship the sun."

Malinal advanced a step nearer, his shaking hand outstretched as he pointed to the man he would slay; and Anthony, whose tall form rose head and shoulders above his guard, felt the eyes of the Indians upon him. They were watching, and if he showed the slightest trace of fear they would rush in and bear him to the sacrifice. No longer was the fate of those who had gone before concealed behind the veil of mystery. On this high, smoke-plumed pyramid they had been laid across the stone and their hearts cut out for the war god.

Close about him, their faces drawn, their weapons ready to strike, stood Ishtli and his faithful guard; but they too were aliens in this land. They were Zapotecs, fairer of skin and bolder of eye, but outnumbered a hundred to one. Porfirio's voice quavered as, after a passionate appeal, he interpreted Malinal's words; and, seized by a sudden impulse, Anthony turned and whipped up his gun. Then as Malinal paused and a hush fell on the crowd he strode towards him, up the broad stairs.

Death was near now and the end could only be postponed, but before he died Anthony had it in his power to strike down this treacherous priest. One flip of his gun barrel and, whether he fled or fought back, the high priest of Huitzil Opochtli would drop dead.

"Old man," he said in Spanish as the line of priests fell back, "your time has come to die." And he halted, his gun poised and waiting.

But Malinal, whether he understood the words or not, had read his intent in his face; nor could he doubt that the magic rifle would obey its master's will. He was as good as dead, yet the instinct to live was still strong in his weazened breast. With a sharp cry of supplication he rushed down the stairs and threw himself at Gambel's feet.

On the terraces above, the black-robed priests stood staring; and when Malinal, falling down, placed his hands upon his head, they gave a great wail of dismay. Anthony glanced back at Ishtli and the dumbfounded guards, and at Porfirio who had sunk down in prayer; then with a smile of triumph he lifted his foot and placed it on Malinal's neck. It was a vainglorious gesture, but necessary for its effect. By that sign he had made Malinal his slave.

"Tell the people to disperse," he ordered in Spanish; and the high priest rose up, shaking with the aftermath of fear. No words came to his lips as he surveyed the startled multitude; but with a sudden, angry gesture he motioned them to begone and turned to take his place with the guard. A great silence fell and as the way opened before them Don Antonio and his tiger men marched south.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MAN-TRAP

WITH quick, anxious strides, glancing often behind him at the black smoke on the war god's temple, Ishtli, the captain, led the way down a broad highway, while his tiger soldiers kept guard behind. But the old, easy confidence with which in the face of death they had confronted the Aztec mob had given way to a look of fear; for, plodding along in front of Gambel, his grizzled head wagging angrily, paced Malinal, the high priest of Huitzil Opochtli.

But for him as a hostage, their lives would now be forfeit. Yet as the soldiers gazed at Anthony, riding blithely behind his prisoner, their stern eyes glowed malevolently. He had saved himself, but at what a cost to them who had been sent to guard his life; for not in three days' march would they escape from the Aztec country into the land of their own people, the Zapotecs. And those three days would bring other hordes upon them if Malinal walked in their train.

He had found himself again after the moment of desperation in which he had surrendered to Gambel; and his keen, malignant glances showed that already in his mind some plan of escape was forming. Not for anything but to save his life would he consent to remain long a prisoner to the hated *teule;* and yet Anthony, though he watched him, showed no fear of the old man who would have plucked out his heart for the war god.

The Mixtecas were two people—the short, swarthy Aztecs and the light-skinned Zapotecs who dominated them. And here, as in all nations where the blood is mixed, a race conflict was going on. Anthony had noted how Ishtli and his stern tiger soldiers had knocked the cringing Aztecs about. Was it not reasonable to expect then that, if he could make his way to Quanahuac, Chimal Popoca would prove his friend? For he, the cacique, was the high priest of the sun god and Malinal was his enemy.

But as they marched down the road through village after village where the inhabitants rushed out angrily to stop them, Gambel saw he held a snake by the neck. Evening came and they took possession of a house of solid stone, the better to withstand a siege; but Ishtli was sullen now and Anthony saw that even Gonzales was afraid to oppose Malinal. He was alone, and in the night the wriggling serpent would slip away—but first he would flesh his fangs.

He swelled with rage like a puff-adder when Anthony, standing guard, ordered him back as he glided towards the door; and as night came on he sat glowering and watchful, biding his time until his captor slept. There was nothing to be gained now by treating him kindly and while the soldiers looked on with awe Gambel drew from his pack a pair of glittering handcuffs. Malinal rose up swiftly, his beady eyes gleaming as he divined the purpose of the manacles, but before he could dart away Anthony caught him by the arm and snapped the steel nipper over his wrist. Then, shoving him roughly against a post, he shackled both hands behind it and lay down on the floor to sleep.

In the morning when he arose, the hard ground about the post was torn up by Malinal's ceaseless struggles, but the scotched snake was still there, and despite his angry protests Gambel kept his arms fastened behind his back. They traveled fast down a paved highway, worn smooth by years of use, and as they passed down from the mountains the pines and cedars fell away, giving place to jungles and palms. Fields of cotton and corn appeared, and growths of rank cane through which birds of gaudy plumage fluttered lazily about like patches of animated light.

The high cliffs, which for two days had shut them in, spread out to make room for broad farms, and Anthony could see signs of a civilization almost startling in its resemblance to the European. The people were taller now, and here among them he saw women whose faces were almost fair—then at some squat village they would encounter a mob of Aztecs for the soldiers to buffet aside. Their good cheer had returned with the light of a new day and as they swung on towards their own country they burst into a chant, for the sun god had saved them from death.

In each town through which they passed on the following day there were temples to Quetzalcoatl—tall pyramids of earth overlaid with trimmed stones, trailing the smoke of their fires against the sky. But taller and newer were the tower-like temples of Huitzil Opochtli, and as the procession drew near the long drums made of snakeskin rolled out their loud alarm. Black smoke from the twin altars summoned the Aztecs by the hundred to oppose the strangers' march; but, with Anthony's gun at his back, the grim eyed Malinal dispersed them with his curious, ducklike croaks.

ON THE third day, still following south, they entered a country so beautiful that it seemed enchanted. A broad river went winding down through meadows of vivid green, where sheep and cattle grazed, and along its banks slim palms thrust up tips as dainty as a fairy's wand. Fields spread out for miles and miles, encircled by walls of stones; and across the sward plodded clay-colored Spanish oxen, dragging long-handled wooden plows. Here at last was indisputable proof of the European origin of their culture; and yet on both sides the tall white cliffs rose up, shutting Mixtlan away from the world.

On the highway, as if for market day, long lines of Indians plodded past, Indians with light colored skins and clean, well combed hair cut level with the shoulders. And now, instead of the hateful Aztec glare, they encountered the mild glances of Zapotec women and the bold, amiable regard of the men. No more were the people clad in filthy, cotton breechclouts and the skins of mountain bears. The men wore clean, white mantles above their clouted garments and the women were encased in long strips of veil-like cotton, wound round and round their hips. And here and there among them, as they passed some woman of rank, Anthony caught the gleam of jewels and gold.

Every Zapotec woman wore her dowry about her neck: ancient coins of silver and gold, polished beads and solid nuggets and long strings of uncut green stones; but when some lady in her palanquin, borne abroad by brawny slaves, glanced out from behind her curtains he caught the scintillating light of emeralds. Beautiful ruffles of stiff lace, like Elizabethan collars, adorned their slender necks; and when one, the fairest of all, returned his astonished stare, Anthony saw that her eyes were blue.

At last in this far valley, shut off by the Aztecs' hate from all contact with the outer world, he had found what he had sought for through eager, fruitless years—White Indians, even Indians with blue eyes. He turned to Porfirio, who rode gravely beside him, having abandoned all hope of life, and a question was on his lips; but before he spoke he noticed Ishtli, listening intently, as if to catch his words. Could it be that, for all these days, the war captain had understood him and his comments on the country and people? In a land where Spanish plows and cattle were everywhere the language itself must be known. Anthony paused and turned quickly to the chief of the tiger soldiers at whom he shot a sudden question in Spanish.

"He does not understand," observed Porfirio despondently, "but Quanahuac is very near now. Already I can hear the drum on the war god's temple—need we have come so far to die?"

"If we die," answered Gambel, "we will take their high priest with us. But these Zapotecs, Don Porfirio, are civilized. Have you not noticed this level road, and how it is drained and swept, and how clean all the people are? But look at this old man with his filthy, matted hair and his face as black as a pot. He is an Aztec, which is to say a dog. Chimal Popoca will be a different man."

He glanced at Ishtli's face and a look of pleased intelligence flashed over its mask and was gone. But Anthony perceived that his least word had been noted since he had crossed the high divide into Mixtlan. Yet his words had been good, for he liked the stalwart warrior and admired the stern courage which animated him; and as he rode into the outskirts of Quanahuac he sought out more things to praise.

But even here in the Mixtecan capital, with his task nearly done, Ishtli found some new anxiety which quickened his steps and caused him to throw off his mantle. The tiger soldiers stripped down and unslung their copper war clubs; Malinal raised his grizzled head to listen; and on the wings of the wind Anthony heard the Aztec drum beating out its thunderous alarm. Black smoke rose swirling from the double altar of the war god, throngs of people could be seen descending its tower; but from the temple of the sun another smoke was rising and white-robed priests swarmed its broad terraces.

Something unusual had taken place;

there was war in the very air; and as half-armed, fanatical Aztecs came running to bar their way, Ishtli raised his big conch shell and blew. The summons rose loud and clear; then from the square in front of the sun temple an answering signal came. Ishtli spoke to his men and with their shields on their arms they formed into a hurrying hollow square.

FROM the platform of the war temple, black-robed priests came pouring down in a sinister, snakelike processional. The long drum beat a continuous roll, raucous conch shells joined in and the shouts of the waiting multitude grew menacing; but Ishtli, his eyes gleaming, took his place in the lead, holding his peeled wand high in the air. It was the symbol of his authority to safeguard the prisoners, but those who barred the way did not yield before it, and Ishtli snatched at his war club.

With the rush of practiced fighters the tiger soldiers formed a wedge, smashing their way through the thick of the mob; when the Aztecs turned to flee they were thrust back inexorably by the push of their fellows from behind. Their front wavered and held fast, then surged forward and lapped about them; and the next instant every soldier found himself engaged by a dozen yelling Aztecas. They gave back, foot by foot, and as Anthony sensed disaster he dismounted and whipped out his gun.

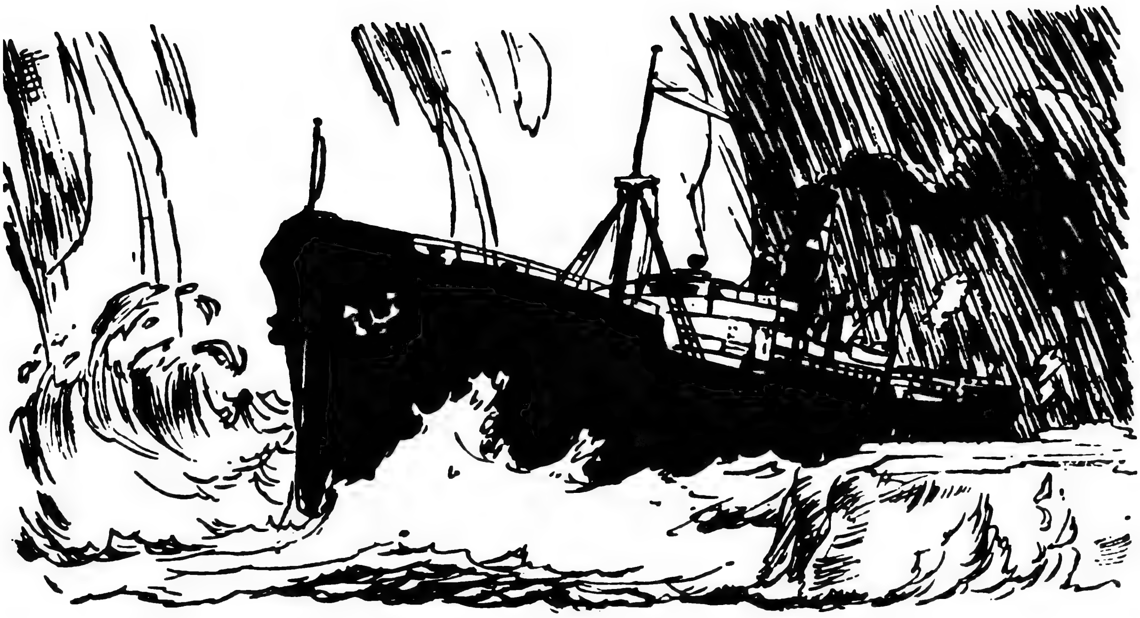
"Ah, la, la!" yelled Ishtli, suddenly throwing down his club and whipping out his long, gleaming sword; and at the sound of the war cry every soldier gave a whoop and bared his blade to kill. But as the loud cry rang out a louder cry made answer to it, and from the great square before the sun temple a column of plumed soldiers came rushing to their comrades' aid. Every sword was in the air, every shield set for battle, and the tall feathers of their head-dresses made a forest of waving plumes, indescribably magnificent and terrifying.

Like one man the swarming Aztecs turned and fled before their charge and the thunder of the war trumpets and conch shells. The side streets were glutted with men who tumbled and fell, then leaped up and fled faster than before. Anthony looked out astounded over the heads of the tiger soldiers, many of whom had lost their feet in the fray, but as the royal guard swept down on them a sudden fear stung him and he looked back for Malinal. But a moment before he had stood cowering against the mule, where he had shuffled along tied to the stirrup; but now he was gone and a clean-cut rope end told the tale of his sudden escape.

Anthony glanced about at the treacherous guards, as if seeking the owner of that knife; but their faces were suddenly hostile and grim. They pressed in upon him silently, ready to strike if he resisted; then, looking him in the eye, Ishtli held out his hands for the gun. For one desperate instant Gambel weighed the chance to escape, but he faced a dozen drawn swords.

"Very well," he said in Spanish and handed over his rifle, the magic weapon which had conquered Malinal. He had been trapped. The cunning Ishtli had bided his time, matching his Indian treachery against the valor of the white man until their journey had come to an end. Anthony found himself a prisoner, but he surrendered with a smile; for in their slings beneath his arms he still had two pistols—and they would take him to Chimal Popoca, their chief.

In the following chapters, Anthony Gambel meets one who is pure white and fair beyond the dreams of men, the Daughter of the Sun; and an ancient, terrible prophecy begins to be fulfilled in the land of the Aztecs.



NINE WINTER, THREE FOG

A Stirring Tale of Valiant Battle with the Sea

By MILLARD WARD

RAIN that swept over Belfast Harbor was petulant and chill but without the edge of winter. The crew of the *Matthews* went about their duties with oilskins hanging flatly from their shoulders instead of bulging over sweaters and peacoats.

Even George Carney, the third mate, leaning over the 'thwartships rail just forward of the saloon house, was not precisely cold. But a winter spent in a bleak Belfast hospital, fighting pneumonia, had left a feeling of weightlessness and uncertainty in him. He wanted only to stand his watch without talking and get away to his room where he would not be disturbed. Before illness he had been a new, but taut, chief mate in another American ship; now as third he was afraid that he would be called upon for more than he could do. The neglect of the owners of the other ship had shaken him as much as illness. His berth was gone; they had made it clear that they were not interested in officers who could not keep well. The fact that his breakdown had been the direct result of a January crossing in one of their huge freighters, with faulty steering gear and a rudder which ultimately carried away altogether, did not appear to make any difference.

He had been only a week out of bed when the chance came of a berth in the *Matthews,* whose third mate had broken his arm.

"A temporary berth, mister," the captain had assured him. "Temporary. I got to look after my own men."

Acceptance had been automatic; he needed the money. Now, after two days on board, he was still afraid that somebody would speak to him.

His old ship, the *Western Voyager,* was back in Belfast, lying at the next quay; but Carney had not been aboard and did not intend to go. The *Voyager's* huge gray hull overshadowed the black and rust streaked *Matthews* like a mountain; the only similarity between the vessels being the flags on their poops.

Both ships were nearly empty of cargo, and the men of the *Matthews* were busy covering her forward hatches, which had been finished first, and trimming in the booms. One of the crew had been in the hospital with Mr. Carney and, like him, was new on board. This was Bill Stewart, a tall, slim boy of eighteen or nineteen, an ordinary seaman who had been struck by a slingful of general cargo on his first trip to sea. The *Matthews* did not ordinarily carry any but A. B. seamen, but when a Scottish sailor jumped ship, Captain Frazier, a native of Matthews County, Virginia, had taken Bill for the return voyage because he was American born.

Carney could pick out the ordinary from among the oilskinned men because of his build, and in the same way he recognized the bos'n. The bos'n, however, was Bill's opposite: short, thick chested, long armed. His forehead sloped sharply to touseled yellow hair, showing under his sou'wester, while the teeth in his heavy jaws were broken and tobacco stained. His eyes were small and blue, disturbingly alive.

As Carney watched, Bill gave a wrong lead to a guy wire, and was sent staggering by a vicious, unexpected shove from the bos'n. The boy stood cringing as the bos'n snarled at him, the voice but not the words carrying to where the third mate stood. Carney straightened instinctively and took half a step toward the ladder to the well deck, then the cold, uncertain feeling inside him grew too strong and he turned aft.

ON THE deck amidships he nearly ran into the chief mate, Mr. Wallace. The mate was a big man, but with everything about him too round. He was the only officer on board who wore more uniform than a cap. He seemed irritated at the near collision.

"Captain wants to see you in the cabin," he said in a voice at the same time high pitched and rough.

Carney nodded silently and swung his body around the handrail of the ladder to the lower bridge. His conscience was clear but was afraid he had forgotten something that ought to be on his conscience.

The captain's manner, however, as he turned away from his desk at the third mate's knock, was worried rather than accusing.

"Come in, Mister Carney. Sit down."

Carney pulled off his sou'wester and balanced himself on the edge of the captain's settee. Captain Frazier leaned forward slightly. He was a short, compact man with white hair and brown, parchmentlike skin. Carney thought that he must be very old, but his eyes were clear blue and thoughtful.

"What did you say was the name of your last ship?"

"*Western Voyager*, sir," Carney forced himself to speak.

"That one over there in the next slip?"

"Yes, sir."

"Um—hum. What kind of speed's she make, mister?"

"Ten regular, sir. She can do twelve or thirteen."

The captain nodded with his whole body.

"Yes. Yes. That's what I thought—feared."

Mention of the *Western Voyager* brought Carney's desire simply to get away around to a queer defensive anger. He felt unreasonably that the big gray ship had forced him into a corner.

"Why, sir? May—may I ask?"

"Well, it looked like I had a chance for a paying charter. I own most o' this ship, mister. There's an airplane company in the United States that just landed a big Government contract that they didn't really expect to get. They can carry it out, but they got to have Irish linen in a hurry. They want it in an American ship, and this'n and that *Western Voyager* are the only ones ready to load and sail. They say they'll accept the first cargo into Boston Harbor—that's where they tranship from—at a mighty stiff price. Any other cargoes got to sell in open market. I been losin' money last couple o' trips; looked like I'd have to sell my share in the ship. Not often a chance like this comes the way of a tramp. Oh, well, he's the faster ship and that's all there is to it."

The captain's quiet speech made Carney feel clearer headed. This was a ship owner who took care of his men, the third mate remembered, even if he himself was not included among them.

"I got an idea, Captain. What's the best this ship can do?"

"Eleven, if you drive her."

"I think it's enough, sir. That *Voyager*—I was in her over a year. Her captain's afraid of ice. He lost a ship once that way. He'll go way down south to be safe and come up the coast. He'll lose a lot of time. Contract or no contract, he'll do that. All we got to do is cut right across, Great Circle or near it, and we'll be in Boston ahead of him."

Captain Frazier smiled grimly.

"And how about us, mister? Ice is very bad this spring. Bergs and floe ice reported farther south than I ever heard of."

Carney's excitement was dying down.

"Well, I just thought I'd tell you, sir."

The captain's gaze settled upon the toes of his soft black shoes and did not waver minute after minute. Presently Carney rose, hesitated respectfully and went out.

On deck he watched some time while last of the cargo was slung ashore from the after holds, and saw those hatches covered, too. As he came forward then he encountered Mr. Wallace again, at the foot of the lower bridge ladder.

This time the chief mate was swelling with personal wrath.

"That's your bright idea about taking the Northern Route, eh, mister? The Old Man's set on it now." Wallace was nearly choking, forgetting everything but rage. "Maybe damned beachcombers and worn-out shellbacks want to go down with the ship, but I got a command waiting for me when I get back. A real command, not a dishpan like this. I wasn't going to say anything, but now I told him. I told him plenty. What do I want to take chances in this thing for?"

Violence brought the old clammy vacancy back into Carney's midsection and he shrank back a step.

"It's the Old Man's last chance to save his interest in the ship," he said thickly.

"What the hell do you care about the Old Man's interest in the ship? He's not going to keep you, anyway. Don't worry about that."

Carney walked away unsteadily. He could hear the mate's angry laughter following him.

AFTER a while he noticed the unlicensed men gathering about the two passages, one on each side of the ship, that led into the saloon. He could not think of any reason for this, unless the captain had had the mate call all hands.

Mr. Wallace reappeared and forced his way roughly through the crowd into the port passageway. Rain still fell thinly, and, seeing the engineers and other officers going in first, Carney followed them, stopping just inside the door. Beyond the inner end of the passage he could see Captain Frazier sitting at the saloon table. Mr. Wallace stood nearer the door. It was the chief mate who spoke.

"Come in, men."

In the orderly surge of oilskins and dungarees past him, Carney caught sight of the ordinary seaman, Bill Stewart. Caps and sou'westers came off automatically as the men passed the outer doorsill, but the button on the chin strap of Bill's sou'wester was so new and stiff that the boy was still fumbling with it in the passage.

Not a yard away from Mr. Carney a thick arm shot out, caught the brim of the sou'wester and wrenched left and right. Bill's neck jerked as though it would break, there was a short tearing sound, and the sou'wester slapped on the floor. Carney caught a glimpse of the bos'n's moving eyes and bared teeth.

This could not be evaded. He rapped the bos'n on the shoulder.

"What's the idea? No need of that."

The bos'n blinked at him with his unfathomable eyes and said nothing.

Mr. Wallace cut in sharply.

"Keep out o' this, mister. I don't know about your other ship, but in this ship the men take off their hats in the captain's presence."

Carney could feel his cheeks tighten slowly with blood, but he could not face the mate.

When the men were gathered inside the saloon, Captain Frazier rose. He wore a civilian coat of worn blue serge and a narrow black necktie.

"I want to tell you, men," he said clearly, "the homeward voyage will be dangerous. We're going the Northern Route to try to beat that gray ship lying next us. There'll be danger o' ice. If any man wants to quit now, I'll pay him his full wages and let him go."

There was a pause, the roomful of eyes fixed unwaveringly on the captain's face.

"Come, men, speak up. What do you say?"

The ship's carpenter, a huge man with a thick red mustache, replied from the front rank. His voice was as deep and slow as the surf on a level beach, but there was amazement in it.

"Sirr, if a mon is to be afraid o' the sea, o' ice, o' fog, o' storms, that mon could not go to sea."

"Thank ye," said the captain. And the men went back on deck.

An hour later the *Matthews* shifted her berth and began loading her new cargo. The *Western Voyager* now lay alongside the same quay, not fifty yards away. Captain Frazier had been sailing into Belfast irregularly for many years and knew men whose friendship offset the influence of the company which owned the other ship. So the two were equally well served.

After dark, work on both vessels went on by electric cluster lights, with rumble of winches on board and clatter of trucks ashore. Mr. Carney stayed on deck until late. He would be on duty all night, but, having Bill Stewart as newly appointed night watchman, he hoped to get a nap before morning. Most of the crew had gone ashore and there was tranquillity about the ship in spite of the activity of the longshoremen.

After the closing hour of the public houses, the seamen began to straggle back: the young ones quarterdeck drunk, gaily riotous but able to walk straight and be quiet if there were any reason to; the older men keeping an indulgent eye on them

TOWARD midnight Mr. Carney sent Bill down on the quay to take the ship's draft, he himself remaining at the head of the gangway.

The rain had stopped by this time and Bill's outer garment was a light dungaree coat. Carney, following the boy with his eyes, was rather surprised to notice that the body under the dungarees was well controlled and muscular in spite of its light frame.

When Bill reached the gangway again, he stopped to tie a trailing shoe lace, his back toward the nearest door of the warehouse on the quay. As he stooped, the bos'n came through that door, the collar of a wrinkled serge coat turned up around his ears and a checked cap pulled low. Carney could tell from his peculiarly set face that he was drunk, but there was no other betraying sign.

If he had gone straight to the gangway, the bos'n would have cleared Bill, but when he caught sight of the boy he swung aside and ran into him violently. Bill pitched forward, his hands barely saving his face from the thick black mud on the cobblestones. The bos'n swung his arms and muttered.

As Bill scrambled up and backed away, half a head taller than the other man, words tore themselves out of Mr. Carney's throat; words that seemed to come a long distance away.

"What the hell's a matter with you, kid? Sock 'im! You're not on board the ship. Sock 'im!"

Bill cast a startled glance over his shoulder, and swung his long right arm. The blow landed on the bos'n's chest with a drumlike sound, and the boy's left followed wildly to the ear. The bos'n lowered his head and roared. Bill went back before his charge, stumbling over the wet stones; and a pile of empty boxes that had been standing against the warehouse wall came down with a crash between them. They met again in the débris. Through the half darkness their movements seemed doubly violent and grotesque. They swung their fists wildly and rebounded from each other. The longshoremen forward and aft stopped work to watch, gaping and grinning.

But on deck Mr. Carney was dazed. As Bill passed a light there had been a smear of blood on his face. The third mate could not believe that it was he who had started this. The air was wet, full of the smell of salt and soft coal smoke. In this bleakness the fight seemed sinister and terribly useless. The cheers and laughter from the longshoremen brought his eyes back to the quay.

The bos'n was on his back in the sticky mud, Bill Stewart standing over him, with his head thrust forward.

A door slammed at Carney's back and he heard quick, heavy steps on deck.

"What's this? What's this?" Mr. Wallace was crowding his side. "Men fighting under our nose and you standing here? What's the matter, mister? What's the matter?"

Carney could not answer. The mate grunted with utter contempt and then called loudly:

"Come up here, you two. Lively."

Bill prudently followed the bos'n up the gangway and stood before the mate.

"Oh, it's you, bos'n? Can't handle your men, when you're drunk, eh? Well, you better keep sober then when you got an officer on watch that's afraid to back you up. As for you, fighter, you'll be surprised some day how irons feel. Get out o' this now, both of you."

After the men were gone, Mr. Wallace spoke to the third mate again, briefly:

"The captain's going to be interested in this, mister."

Then he turned his back slowly and went into the saloon passage.

But Captain Frazier did not mention the incident to Carney during the next few days. The only immediate result was a great change in Bill Stewart's manner about the deck. In spite of work harder and dirtier than ever, he swaggered and found a cock for his chin. Carney felt desolately that there was no one left to whom he could talk.

Loading went on rapidly. The crews of the two ships took the race to heart, but the *Voyager's* were derisively confident. They could not understand even hope in the men of the *Matthews*. Remarks were shouted from ship to ship and potatoes thrown.

Then, on the morning of the sailing day, the two captains went down together and paid the fines of those of their crews who had come together in a public house the night before.

IN THE afternoon, with booms hastily lowered and the men still busy battening down the hatches, the *Matthews* and the *Western Voyager* were heaved out of their slips and turned around by puffing, side wheel tugs. The *Matthews* had a start in clearing the dock, but all through the run up Belfast Lough the *Voyager* gained, and as they lifted to the first of the long swells outside, the big gray ship began to draw ahead. From her bridge a tall man in uniform looked back and waved the end of a rope triumphantly.

"Wants to give us a tow, eh?" muttered Captain Frazier. "Well, well, who knows?"

By dark the *Voyager* was out of sight.

On board the *Matthews*, the strain under which the engine room men worked, extended subtly to the deck. Captain Frazier personally ordered the running gear of the cargo booms overhauled and any faulty parts replaced. Also wire spring lines had to be spliced and new boat falls reeved.

There were scarcely enough men for this work, Bill Stewart being of little use. Carney saw him rarely. The sea was high, and the ship's rolling made watches pass more quickly, balancing to the long lift and fall of the bridge being in itself an occupation. At the change of the watches Mr. Wallace never spoke to the third mate except for the few necessary, words, and though Captain Frazier was often on the bridge, he was preoccupied and silent.

On the second morning the wind began to rise, so level and steady that there was nothing in it of either cold or warmth; only pressure could be felt. After his afternoon nap, which he took with knees drawn up and braced across his berth, Mr. Carney handed himself across to the lee door of the saloon for a look at the weather. Although the sun would still be well above the horizon, darkness was far advanced, the sea, slate colored gulches and mountains in white avalanche.

As he clung to the hand rail by the door, hoping that the *Western Voyager* was getting the same or worse, he saw Bill Stewart coming forward along the alleyway in the deckhouse.

Bill's dungarees were gray and clinging; his face dead white. Apparently blind effort was needed to walk at all and as he drew nearer Mr. Carney caught the thin smell of bilge water, crude oil, rotten grain, dead rats. Yet somehow the ghost of a swagger was still there. The third mate stepped out on deck.

"What's matter, Bill?"

Bill managed a lift of his pale lips.

"Bilge divin', sir." He wavered on long, bedraggled legs. "I been seasick, too."

Carney knew, from what he had heard Mr. Wallace say, that the bilges were not in any real need of cleaning. The bos'n's hand stood out plainly. He appreciated, too, that this was not an appeal; merely an answer to a question.

"Listen, Bill," he said suddenly. "Can you steer?"

"I was at the wheel a few times comin' over. I got on to it pretty good, but I'm not a shark."

Carney thought a moment.

"Well, I'll tell you. Come up when I'm on some night—your own time, see—after this blow dies down and if you make out all right, I'll try to get you on watch. I don't promise anything, but I got an idea."

"Thanks. I'll come, but I ain't scared o' that bos'n."

Carney did not remember until after Bill was gone that he had resolved not to be mixed up in any more trouble.

That night, when Mr. Carney came on watch, there was no sign of slackening in the gale and the sea had had more time to rise. The chief mate went below silently, not forgetting his anger even in the stress of the weather. Carney stationed himself on the lee wing of the bridge, just outside the wheelhouse door. He was comfortable enough in oilskin over a heavy sweater, but through the insistent rush of air against his ears, he could hear the whining of the rigging and the long tearing of spray against steel.

Inside the wheelhouse the only light was upon the helmsman's face; a faint, yet deep, yellow glow from the binnacle. The man's legs were wide on his grating and he hugged the wheel tightly to his stomach.

The third mate drew back enough to allow the canvas dodger above the forward rail of the bridge to take the worst of the wind, and stared ahead. There was nothing in sight but the flash of crests before waves struck. The wind had hauled somewhat to the westward and the *Matthews* half pitched, half rolled with a dizzy, whirling motion. Her bluff fo'c's'le would swing up and up, then let go and drop. There was the boom and shock of meeting seas on the downward plunge, the wide white wings of spray outward from the bows.

When two seas came aboard in succession, the third mate called the lookout in from the bow and placed him on the weather wing of the bridge.

Again time passed more quickly because of the storm. There was not much need for other thought. Only the idea of the big gray ship somewhere to southward clung in Carney's mind. He had to know that she had not permanently beaten him. The idea that was to even the score had been his; indeed, the score would be evened only for that reason, but he was afraid he would fail somehow in his part. He thought that doubt and uncertainty would never end. It was as though he had come out of cold into fog; from suffering into vacancy where he was lost. The vacancy itself was suffering.

AT FOUR bells the helmsman and the lookout changed places and Mr. Carney took a turn across the bridge. He felt the beginning of weariness; his eyes were heavy with wind. The *Matthews* whirled dizzily and crashed into a sea. The planks of the bridge were slippery, drenched with spray. The wind ground at Carney's face above the canvas dodger as he reached his old place, and a green light beneath the *Matthews'* port bow leaped out like flame into his eyes. There were narrow bands of sail above the light, crossing the lines of masts, all plunging sideways into the trough of a sea.

Carney's mind jerked, and the yell forced itself out.

"Hard a' starboard!"

The helmsman spun the wheel, while the officer clung to the forward rail, his eyes burning. It seemed for a moment that chance would decide; both ships tossed like corks on the huge seas; then the steamer's bow moved with directed doggedness. At the same time the ships dived at each other, and the end of the stranger's main yard fouled the *Matthews'* lower bridge. The sail flew up wildly, ripping away into darkness while wood buckled and crashed. Then the masts swung the other way on a ninth wave and were gone.

Carney walked dazed into the wheelhouse.

"Put 'er back on 'er course," he croaked.

Captain Frazier came up through the chartroom in bathrobe and slippers, and after him was the thick shadow of Mr. Wallace.

"What happened, Mister Carney?" the captain asked with quiet grimness.

"Sailing ship's yard fouled us amidships, sir. We were swinging to port when she struck and we never touched her hull."

"No, I don't think we hit her. It didn't feel like it. But why did you let her get so close?"

"Her starboard light was all that showed, sir. I couldn't pick it up until a few seconds before we came together."

The chief mate's voice cut in harshly.

"I saw that light myself. I was turned in, but a while ago we were rolling so heavy that I raised up my port to see how the weather was and saw that starboard light plain, five minutes anyhow before she struck. You must have been feeling sick again, Mister Carney."

Carney drew his mind together carefully; it was like walking a slippery deck. He had been tired but not sick. Now he felt sick. The light had been definitely to port of the *Matthews* when he first saw it. He had been looking that way carefully. The sailing ship had been crossing their course from port to starboard at a fairly sharp angle, there was nothing else that she could have been doing. Mr. Wallace's room was on the starboard side of the ship. He had two port-holes, but the one above his berth opened flatly to starboard, and it would have been physically impossible for him to see the light until the *Matthews* swung, a bare instant before the yard struck. Carney himself had had the light in view less than two minutes.

The definite knowledge that the mate was lying left him sicker and more lost than ever. He groped blindly for relief.

"To port. She was to port. You couldn't see her, Mister Wallace. But—but that's all right. You just got mixed up."

Wallace took a great step forward.

"The hell, I couldn't see her! On a course nearly parallel with ours! Are you calling me a liar?"

Captain Frazier's voice held a cold edge.

"I'm here, Mr. Wallace. Ye're forgetting that. Ye may go below."

When the mate was gone, the captain went on, his words too low to carry across the wheelhouse.

"I saw before I came up, mister, there's not much damage done. But I'm sorry Mister Wallace mentioned that. Mister Wallace is leaving when we get in and I had ye in mind . . . Well—well never mind that now. Try to keep a better watch after this."

Captain Frazier crossed over, glanced into the binnacle and went below without saying any more.

THE next day, as the weather moderated, the radio man of the *Matthews* picked up the first position report from the *Western Voyager*. She was well to the southward and not as far ahead as Carney had feared. He still thought that if she could be beaten he could pull himself together. It was likely that the storm had hit her even harder than it had the *Matthews*. The *Matthews* herself, having most of her owners on board, in the person of Captain Frazier, sent out no reports whatever.

That night, in a sea that heaved restlessly but was no longer dangerous, Bill Stewart came up to steer. His breaking-in was easy. He seemed to get the feel of the stubby old ship almost at once. After the first half hour, seeing his face relaxed and dreamy in the binnacle light, his hands moving the spokes of the wheel with slow precision from time to time, Carney left him alone and went out on the wing of the bridge.

When the boy went below at ten o'clock, the third mate turned his head.

"You can steer all right."

"She's an easy ship, sir. More than the other one, anyway. I like steering. I used to ride a wheel and drive a car. It's not so different."

"Probably that's why you pick it up so easy."

After that, Bill came up five nights in succession. He seemed not satisfied that already he steered as well as the able seamen. After long days of dirty, aimless drudgery he clung to the precision of steering at night, sought perfection in something. Often in the nearly calm sea, the lubber line that marked the *Matthews'* bow, clung to her course fifteen, twenty minutes at a time without wavering. It was as if Bill could read the ship's mind and meet her impulses before she moved.

At one of these times Captain Frazier was in the wheelhouse. When he came out on the wing of the bridge, he said, approvingly:

"Boy steers well."

This seemed to Carney the opportunity he had been waiting for.

"Yes, sir. He's been practicing up because he wants to go on watch. He sees he's not much good at the splicing so he thought he could free an A. B. who could splice and that way get the work on the rigging finished before we get in."

"That's a good spirit," said the captain. "And a good idea. I'd like to keep him after this trip—" He checked himself abruptly, then saw that he had to go on. "But I never carry ordinaries. Don't believe it pays. Anyhow, you can have him on your watch until we get in. Tell the mate."

The *Matthews* had increased her proportionate lead over the *Voyager* each day a little, and, though ice warnings were now coming in frequently, tension on board relaxed. The chief mate no longer dignified Mr. Carney with even his animosity. His manner changed to contemptuous carelessness. Each day brought his command definitely nearer, and he could not even quarrel with a third mate whose inefficiency was established. Carney was merely glad that danger of violent collision was over. He wanted only to beat the *Voyager*.

Then on the morning of the eighth day from Belfast, fog shut down—a quiet white blanket that ended sight. The change was not in the ship's work but in the world. In the daytime the sea about her was like a close, oily plate. At night the thickness was driven into the watch officer's face by the ship's speed, cool but as full of the threat of stifling as the beginning of smoke. A lookout was kept constantly on the bow and a man added to each watch to stand by. The brass handles of the engine room telegraph remained at "full ahead." But through day and night, at two minute intervals, there was the steam whistle; a bull's bellowing, hopeless but unendingly defiant.

For the mates, after four hours of tenseness on watch, came eight of relaxation below. Captain Frazier stayed on watch, a square, silent figure at an open forward window of the wheelhouse. His food came on trays, and there was no sleep. At the end of twenty-four hours, when he was preparing for a nap in the chartroom, the first ice breath came; a sharp chill in the breeze through the fog, and an instant drop of thirty degrees in the temperature of the sea water.

So he stayed on the wing of the bridge, with engines slowed for the first time. Mr. Carney was with him. The ship crept ahead. There was an effort to judge the breeze, the set of the current; regular casting of the neat canvas bucket for water temperature; the strain of ears for surf or cracking ice. It was impossible to see half the ship's length beyond her bows; but she worked past in safety.

Captain Frazier went back into the wheelhouse. Ten more years had touched his face.

"She oughtn't to go any more than 'half ahead,' Mister Carney," he said. "Oh, well, we got no time to spare. Slap her all the way down."

The captain gave a little, wheezing sigh and leaned against a forward window frame. In a few minutes the *Matthews* was making eleven knots again.

THAT afternoon, just before supper, Carney overheard the first assistant engineer talking to the second.

"Hell, yes. I should say he did. Wanted me to cut her down on the four to eight and say nothing about it. Offered me money. I was going to push his face, big as he is, but he beat it."

"Sure," the second replied. "I knowed he was yellow ever since dat night in Antwoip. He's scared o' de ice and fog. So'm I, but I wouldn't let de Old Man down."

Mr. Wallace's watch was the four to eight.

The radio man had caught another noon position from the *Western Voyager*, Carney learned at supper, which cut down the *Matthews'* lead to a very narrow margin. There was no fog reported that far south.

When the third mate took the watch that night, he saw Mr. Wallace's face briefly in the chartroom. It seemed even fatter than it had been, but loosened in every way, almost soggy. His manner was vicious.

Captain Frazier stayed on the bridge through Carney's watch. Once there was more ice breath, but not so strong.

At midnight the second mate appeared. He was a surprisingly young man, with stiff orange hair and a chronically sleepy expression. He stopped at Carney's side.

"Still thick," the third mate told him.

The second yawned.

"So I notice. But what do you expect? You know how the months go on the North Atlantic—nine winter, three fog." He lowered his voice confidentially. "But I wonder the Old Man don't give up and take a sleep. It's my opinion he won't turn in because he figures it's only on his account we ain't slowed down and he's got to take care of us."

The next morning when Carney went on watch, the fog had not broken. The steam whistle had worn a place for itself in his consciousness and was hardly noticed any longer. Captain Frazier was still on watch. When he turned his face, Carney was shocked. The captain's skin was grayish yellow, his mouth half contorted and his eyes terrible to look at. He had been without sleep for nearly sixty hours. His voice was a scraping croak.

"I'm goin' lay down char' room, Misser

Carney. If you smell any ice, stop 'er, gimme call." He looked at the third mate and wavered solemnly. "Half hour, wansha call me anyhow. Gim-gimme goo' call."

Through the chartroom door Carney could see a corner of the settee with the captain's feet collapsed on one side.

Fog streamed through the open forward window in fading wisps. The two doors were also open and the breeze was growing stronger.

Carney kept watch in the extreme port wing of the bridge for a while and then shifted over to starboard. The captain's half hour was nearly up when the breeze chilled again. The cold came out of the fog with a flat directness. Carney whistled for the stand-by man to take water temperature.

While the man was casting the little bucket, Carney realized that there was sound in the fog. It was not a ship whistling in the distance; too continuous. It rose and fell with deep regularity; there was fascination in it.

Carney felt taut and quiet inside. He did not need the water temperature now.

In the chartroom, Captain Frazier would not wake up. There was no time to keep at him. The beginning of panic broke before the thought of the big gray ship speeding through open water to southward. Carney reached the engine room telegraph in two strides, and swung the indicator to "stop."

"Starboard your hellum," he said to Bill Stewart.

The boy reacted instantly.

Carney stood at the open window. The vibration of surf did not die out but grew harder to place; it might have been part of the air. The lookout's hail came indistinctly from the fo'c's'le head. Probably, the officer thought, he was uncertain what to report. In the lazy softness of everything, danger seemed impossible; but the pervasiveness of sound could not be altogether imagined. Carney leaned both elbows on the window sill and listened, with head thrust out. Definitely there was surf on both sides.

He spoke to Bill over his shoulder.

"Put 'er back on 'er course if she still steers; if not, 'midships."

The *Matthews* rolled slowly and easily. The fog was shifting and eddying about under the fanning of the breeze. Carney tried again, almost on the run, to wake the captain but it was impossible. It was like tormenting a corpse.

HE WENT out on a wing of the bridge. There was no more way on the *Matthews* but the surf was louder. His eyes strained uselessly into the fog. The ladder to the monkey bridge was at his back; he turned and swung up hand over hand. From the forward rail some of the dead opaqueness seemed gone from the fog. The breeze was beginning to cut through his clothes.

Ahead and to port a line was breaking clear of the even gray, a faint, blurred line, high, scarcely curving. The mass behind it was not a cliff because it was lighter gray than the mist which had not quite released it. The fog moved and Carney saw that the mass was white with ledges and smooth slopes. The surf was white, too, about its base.

A cracking sound, and a roar of water, came from ahead, but to starboard. Carney turned desperately. There was another line to starboard, lower, going into the water at a long slope, but with no end to its length. The wall of the other ice towered above the ship, leaving her in cold, dead air.

Beyond the ship's bow, between the two barriers lay a gap, narrowing and fog filled.

Carney heard his own steps, drumlike on the light floor. He jumped clear to the navigating bridge, landing on hands and knees, and went into the wheelhouse in one dive. The whir and clang of the engine room telegraph was startlingly sharp in the moving of great sounds. The handles were hard down again—"full ahead."

As the ship trembled and gathered herself together, Carney spoke rapidly to the helmsman.

"Forget that compass. Look straight ahead past the foremast. Do you see anything?"

Bill's face was wondering.

"Yeah. Ice, ain't it?"

"We're going ahead again. I want you to just clear that high berg. You got to make a good course."

He saw the boy set himself on the grating, his eyes rapt, his body gone into the ship. The wheel moved a spoke, half a spoke at a time, tenderly. The ship gathered speed.

From the window Carney could see that the port ice was long as well as high; a gigantic berg drifting down on a great field of floe ice. The *Matthews* had been lying tranquilly between them. Already the strait of open water ahead looked narrower than the ship and it was closing. But by the running past of the rugged wall, Carney knew that the *Matthews* would never go any faster.

"Nothing to starboard, Bill."

In this narrowness there was no surf, only a violent dashing of water. A mass of ice let go the cliff beyond the *Matthews'* bow and hurled spray as high as the wheelhouse.

"You're doing good, Bill. Shave 'er. Shave 'er."

The pound and scramble of feet on the bridge ladder jerked Carney's eyes from the bow. The chief mate plunged into the wheelhouse, half dressed, his big face drawn and wrinkled with terror.

"Stop her," he screamed. "Ice ahead, you fool! Stop her!"

Carney shrank automatically before the mate's fury, but he shielded the telegraph with his body.

"She's got to go ahead. We couldn't turn——"

Wallace sprang at him mouthing wildly, his hands stretched for the telegraph handle. Carney felt the blood sink from his face; he was cold inside. He could not meet this weight; gave back half a step from the telegraph.

"Sock 'im, Mister Carney. He ain't on watch." Bill's shout from the wheel rose to an imploring squeak. "Sock 'im! Sock 'im!"

Carney swayed, stood firm. From the other side of the world came the memory that he had once known how to hit. His eyes saw again, caught a glimpse of the wireless operator's scared face in the chartroom door, then settled on Mr. Wallace's heavy jaw.

His fist came across, driven by turning shoulder and body's weight, wrist flat, knuckles square. With the sting of landing, the mate's body went backward, reeling toward the wheelhouse door. His feet struck the raised sill and he went down in a useless heap outside.

ICE ran past on both sides smoothly, and from a terrific explosion on the after deck, Mr. Carney judged that a few tons had dropped on board. The *Matthews* was in the strait of open water. In a moment they would be through or caught. The ship reared suddenly, plunging back and forth like an airbraked car, hurling the third mate against the binnacle with no breath left in his body. There was a slow, grinding sound from the after part of the ship, and the ice fell back on both sides, leaving her in calm, open sea. Captain Frazier had been thrown violently from the settee to the floor of the chartroom. He scrambled up and came lurching through the door, brushing the radio man aside. At sight of the captain, the chief mate picked himself up from the bridge and snarled venomously at Carney.

"What's the idea of slugging me? Because I got you out of the jam you were in, eh?"

The sound of the ice coming together astern interrupted all speech; a slow, heavy grumble and cracking that made the air tremble. Captain Frazier stepped out on the wing of the bridge ond looked aft. From the expression of his face, Carney judged that it was still possible to see a good deal, but the captain did not stay outside long. He returned, savage from the shock of broken sleep.

"Now, Mister Wallace, what's this between you and Mister Carney?"

The mate's lips smiled.

"Oh, nothing much, sir. He lost his nerve when he saw the ice closing. The ship was stopped. I got here in time to give 'full ahead' and pull her through. Then when my back was turned, he slugged me."

Bill Stewart's gasp was like escaping steam.

"Whoo-ee!"

Captain Frazier turned sharply.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Mate got things backwards, sir. We was goin' 'full ahead' an' he come in like a crazy man to stop 'er right between the ice. Mister Carney had to sock 'im, but it wasn't from behind."

Wallace laughed.

"I expected a yarn like that. This watch hangs together. But if you want to take an ordinary's word against mine——"

The wireless operator, a tall young man

in thick lensed spectacles, spoke up from the chartroom door.

"I don't mean to butt in, sir, but I was here all the time, and the ordinary has it straight."

Captain Frazier held Wallace in check with an upraised hand.

"Mister Carney, do ye agree with Sparks and the boy?"

Carney nodded silently.

The captain's eyes swung like a turret of guns to the chief mate's face.

"Mister Wallace," he said, "that mark on your jaw was not given to ye from behind. Ye may go below."

After the mate was gone, he stood for a moment without moving. Ahead the fog was thinning, visibility having risen to perhaps a quarter of a mile and the breeze was dryer. The redheaded carpenter came up to the bridge, reporting plates bent along the port side and a section of after rail torn away but no leak or really serious damage.

Captain Frazier nodded quietly.

"I'm going to turn in, Mister Carney," he said. "I believe you can handle this ship."

Before the third mate's watch was out, the sun had burned its way through and the fog was gone. The sea was blue for the first time that voyage. The noon position showed the *Matthews* within one day's run of Boston Harbor, and presently Sparks brought a report that placed the *Western Voyager* still a hundred miles astern of her.

"We'll beat her by a good few hours," said the second mate. "Heigh-ho-hum. I'm sleepy."

Carney tipped his uniform cap to one side of his head and went down the ladder with shoulders square.

The next day when the *Matthews* was tied up to a Boston pier and special gangs of stevedores were whisking the airplane company's linen out of her holds, Carney met Bill Stewart on deck.

He took the boy's elbow and led him to the inshore bulwarks.

"Listen, Bill, do you want to make another trip?"

Bill looked surprised.

"Sure, but the Old Man don't carry ordinaries."

"No more he does. But you're going A. B. on my watch."

"Fine. I like the eight to twelve."

Carney chuckled.

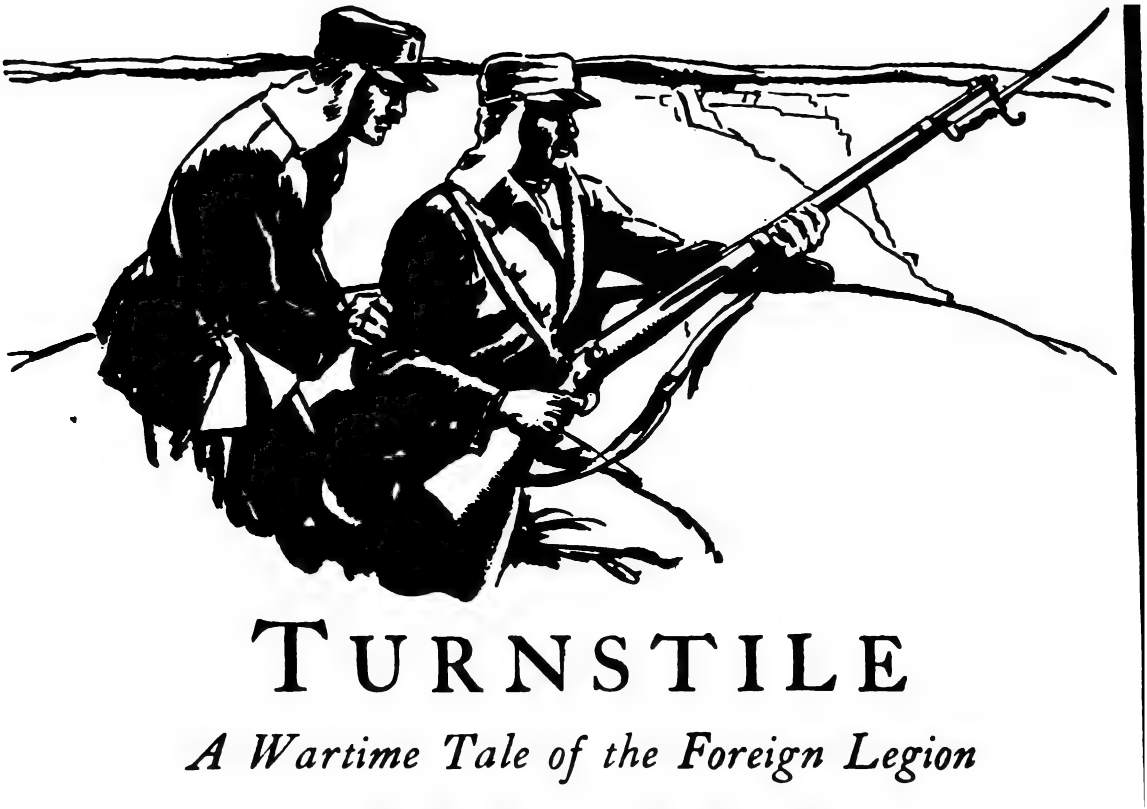
"No eight to twelve about it. Four to eight."

"Then—then, Mister Carney, you're goin' chief mate."

"Sure. That's how I can make you A. B. so easy. Mate has the privilege of creatin' one or two for himself. Old Man was tellin' me."

There was a shout and scurry of feet on the after deck. Carney looked up eagerly.

"What? What? By George, Bill, the *Western Voyager's* coming in. Let's go back and shake a piece o' line at 'em."



TURNSTILE

A Wartime Tale of the Foreign Legion

By GEORGES SURDEZ

Military Hospital, Tadla, Morocco.
Monsieur le lieutenant Henri Delpierre,
Acting chief of the —th Company, First
Battalion, Fourth Foreign Regiment, Ain-el-Mazian, Via Err Zaouya, Morocco.
My Lieutenant:

YOU will be surprised that I should write direct to you, perhaps. I am comfortable here and getting better rapidly. But news of my health is not the reason why I take the liberty to address you.

I have just heard that you cited me for my conduct during the affair around Blockhouse Six where I got my prune in the flank. Unless you cancel your request I shall receive the Legion of Honor, as I have the other medals within the gift of the Republic. I should like the ribbon as well as the next man, not because I set much store by decorations as such, but there's the pension.

Just the same, I can't accept it without explaining something which has been on my mind for a long while. Of course, after six years in the Foreign Legion, I know that things are not judged as they are outside. Still, you know as well as I do that during the relief of Blockhouse Six I did no more than my job. That I was wounded was my bad luck.

I know that the real reason why you are trying to get me the cross is an unofficial one, the business connected with Captain Mastreck, who fell in the Atlas. I had better tell you right off that what I did for Captain Mastreck I did not do for his sake, even for yours. I did it for myself.

Here's the whole thing from the beginning, Lieutenant, and after you've read it, you can do as you wish. Sergeant Paul Gergeau has never been afraid to accept responsibility for his acts.

You remember when Captain Mastreck came to Ain-el-Mazian to take charge of the company? Well he called for me almost immediately. When we were alone, he, a captain, stretched his hand out toward me, a sergeant, and asked me to let the past be buried between us. I called him the name that fitted him and walked out.

He did not dare punish me. You scolded me often afterward because I got drunk. You did not understand. As a matter of fact, Lieutenant, I had to get drunk to forget his mug when the temptation grew too strong. I am sorry also to have gone back in the company during the rifle competition and made a poor score deliberately. For that also, you bawled me out.

First, I must tell you that I met Captain Mastreck before, long ago, in 1911, when I was plugging my two years of regular service as a good citizen should. I had been reported to the authorities as a militant socialist because I had made speeches and written articles for workmen's papers and taken part in strikes. Mastreck, who was a sergeant then, hated socialists and had it in for me. I spent many a night on the hard, sloping plank of the guardhouse instead of in my cot because of him.

I was not the only one.

Mastreck was the worst type of professional noncommissioned officer. He did not drink enough to reel about. But he would get surly and mean tempered. All the abuse a sergeant can inflict on privates, he heaped on these unlucky enough to be his inferiors in rank and his superiors morally and physically. More than one man went to the African prison camps because of him. But I managed to last, and left the regiment in 1913, hoping never to see him again.

In civilian life I was a cabinet maker, like my father before me. For a year I worked in the shop with my brother, Jules, who was a sort of apprentice. We were brothers, but nothing alike. As you know I am swarthy, strong, near six foot tall. He was six years younger, slight, light haired and a bit weak of chest. But I was just an ordinary craftsman, while Jules, from the first, was an artist. The things he did with ebony were jewels. He had white hands, like a woman, and it was great to see him work.

The War came and I left on the first day of mobilization. Mastreck was with the regiment. He recognized me easy and rode me as much as he could. Although I had forgotten I was a socialist, when the fighting started—like most of us yellers. By 1917, Mastreck was *adjudant*, for he was brave if not intelligent.

My brother, Jules, had joined me in the regiment in 1916, although he was under age. He had volunteered, you see, to be with me and do his duty. Not very strong, but a good soldier. He had two bronze stars on his war cross.

At first Mastreck bore down on the kid, who could be teased into retorting rudely before witnesses. He got punished a lot. Then I drew Mastreck aside and told him if he didn't quit I'd fix him. He quit. After a while he seemed even to get fond of Jules; gave him soft snaps when we were at rest back of the lines. I thought that constant contact with men who did their duty had humanized the *adjudant*. I even grew to like him better.

March 1917 . . . You were pretty young then, too young to be at the front, Lieutenant. But you must have heard that the morale of the troops at that time was not brilliant. The Russians had just laid down on their end of the job and America was not yet in the War. It looked like a quick finish for us, a nasty licking, when they got their divisions over from the East. A man need not be an officer to realize that the first to get a new mob of soldiers on the Western Front would rip the other to pieces and pick the cherries from the tree.

We got to feeling we were beaten. Some will deny that, but they don't remember, or deliberately kid themselves. To squelch this growing discouragement, discipline was tightened. Examples were necessary. More and more often men went through the turnstile (*"Le turniquet:* French soldier's slang for court-martial,) and trotted out before a firing squad. Some slackers got it that way, but also a bunch of fine men who had done their duty and paid heavy for an unguarded movement, a careless action.

About that time, our regiment came out of the lines near Soissons, after a stretch of twenty days in the trenches. We were pretty well fagged out, half dumb with the artillery fire. Even our aviation seemed to have cracked to nothing. It was awful to see our flyers brought down oftener than was their turn. On top of that we were given filthy quarters, barns and stables damaged by shells, stinking hovels formerly occupied by African troopers. But we were a good regiment and, if we cursed a lot, we behaved.

WE HADN'T been in the village three days when an order was issued that everybody should stay in quarters ready to move. From the shooting going on up the lines, we knew we would be engaged again soon.

The same night, about ten o'clock, Jules came to me.

"Paul," he said, "Mastreck wants me to sneak out to buy him a bottle of absinthe at the old woman's dump. Orders are against going. What do you say?"

"Guess you better go," I told him. "If you get caught, he'll get you out of trouble. Better keep in with him, Jules."

Mastreck liked absinthe—needed it. He had used it for many years before the Government prohibited the sale. His first idea, whenever we got to a rest area, was to locate some of the stuff. A sort of craving—which he allayed here in Morocco with *anisado*. Also he liked to fill a canteen with it before going up to the lines, to suckle once in a while and keep cheerful. It was natural that he should send somebody, for he couldn't absent himself, being on duty.

My brother left. I did not worry. All the sentries knew him and would let him go by without trouble. Well, he had not been gone ten minutes when the order came to buckle on our knapsacks, trot out into the orchard outside and form in column. I pulled Mastreck's sleeve when he passed me.

"Say, what about my kid brother?"

"Oh, he'll catch up, don't worry."

You know what discipline is. I was not so easy in my mind by then, but I had to leave with the rest.

A regiment of Territorials had given way and lost a kilometer of trenches. We were sent in with the fork and cleaned the Germans out. They were pretty good boys and it took a lot of cleaning, which lasted through the night and the next day. My battalion looked like a company when we marched back into the village.

Of Jules, not a sign.

I walked around for a while asking for him, and finally learned that he was in the lockup, held for the turnstile. The captain, only surviving commissioned officer of the battalion, gave me a paper to get me through and I went in to see him. That was a mistake, as you will understand later.

The kid was more than a little scared. Mostly, he felt bad because he was called a coward. This was what had happened.

Returning to the sheds he found them empty. He was later than he had expected to be because the old woman had asked a lot of questions before consenting to take a chance and sell him the booze. He tried to follow the regiment. But try and find any given unit at night in the maze of communication trenches leading to the front! Even big units had to have guides to pilot them. He lost his way and wore himself out trying to locate us.

He was cold, wet, hungry. Don't forget he'd been walking in mud up to his calves with a knapsack and rifle on his back. In one of his bags was the bottle he had got for Mastreck. He did what anybody would have done, Lieutenant; he took a pull at it, a long pull. Even plain wine went to his head and this was strong stuff. He walked on, finally ended near a battery of 155 short, back of the third line. The gunners saw he was just a kid, kind of drunk, and let him flop in one of their holes.

Before they could get him away the next morning, the police picked him up. They saw his regimental number; word had leaked back of what we were going through up further. Naturally, they accused him of ducking the attack and hiding himself to guzzle while his pals fought. They mixed him up with a lot of questions and found the bottle.

"Mastreck'll clear you," I told him, and went out to look for the *adjudant*. He had gone into some house or other and I could not find him.

Then I went to the schoolhouse where the court-martial was meeting. There was a big room with blackboards on the side. Five officers on the court, a colonel, two majors and two captains. They had got ten men who were toughened by daily contact with misery, and their hearts were like boot leather.

A LOT of fellows, mostly young, went through the turnstile that morning. My heart sank when I heard them sentenced to five and six years Public Works for the loss of a piece of equipment, or for an unguarded word to a sergeant.

I looked for Mastreck again but couldn't find him. When I got back to the schoolhouse Jules was there. They had given him a lawyer, a private who had studied for the bar before the War. He told my brother's story.

"Send for Adjutant Mastreck," the colonel said impatiently.

He came within a few minutes. The way he stood, the way he talked, all pleased the court. He was a good looking soldier was then, clean, tall, strong—the picture of discipline. Beside him, Jules looked like a sick pup.

"Did you send Private Gergeau, Jules, for a bottle of absinthe?" the colonel asked him.

"No. Colonel."

Mastreck remained steady. I don't want to make him seem blacker than he was. If he admitted sending for the forbidden absinthe, it would count heavily against him with the captain, who did not joke on such matters.

"You may speak freely," the colonel insisted. "Here, I am not a colonel, but the president of a court seeking to deal justly with the men brought before me. Nothing you say will be held against you."

You could see that Mastreck was thinking hard. No, he thought, it won't be used against me now. But, farewell promotion to sub-lieutenancy. Mastreck set great store by rank and stripes. You know that, lieutenant—you who saw all he did to get advanced a notch on the promotion list. Risk his life or put a comrade in wrong, no matter as long as he attracted attention.

He licked his lips, shook his head.

"No, Colonel, I didn't send him."

Between the mass of spectators crowded in the rear and the space reserved for the court there was a bunch of poilus with fixed bayonets. I pushed through them, saluted.

"Colonel," I said, "my brother told me when he started out for the bottle that Adjutant Mastreck was sending him."

"There is no proof," the colonel barked.

"I later spoke to Adjutant Mastreck as he left the barracks, and he tacitly admitted having sent my brother."

"Did you?" the colonel asked Mastreck.

"No, Colonel. He lies to save his brother."

The five officers on the court held a brief consulation, looking at me from time to time. My captain stepped up to them and whispered and they seemed better disposed toward Jules.

"Paul Gergeau," the colonel addressed me, "did you have any conversation with your brother since his arrest?"

"Yes, Colonel, I visited him at the lock-up."

"I'm sorry. There's possibility of collusion. Your testimony is void on several counts." The colonel spoke as if he regretted what he had to say.

I tried to talk some more but the men on guard pushed me back and told me to keep still. The old woman admitted selling absinthe to Jules but couldn't be made to say anything against Mastreck. She had to be loyal to her customers for her business. When you get that old you get selfish, I suppose.

The prosecutor got up. He was a captain, in a fine uniform, so clean you could see he never wallowed in the mud the way we did. He was a very good lawyer in civilian life, I heard. He did his duty. He showed how France was fighting for her very existence, how neither youth nor weakness weighed in the balance. A man who dodged an attack must atone. Men knew that under the stern laws of war they musk risk their lives honorably or forfeit them surely. Men could feel pity, he concluded; judges could not.

Jules' lawyer did a foolish thing. Instead of sticking to the story he pleaded for forgiveness. The judges seemed bored when they filed out to deliberate. They came back very soon. The colonel read the decision.

"By five voices out of five, the defendant is guilty." A pause, then: "He will be shot tomorrow morning before his assembled regiment."

I felt as if I had been hit with a club over the head. My whole body turned cold. Jules was standing, very white.

"Gergeau, have you anything to say?" the colonel asked.

"Colonel," Jules' voice was shrill but steady, "I volunteered before my turn, offered my life to France. If she elects to take it this way, still my life is hers. I am not a coward and I'll die without fear and without rancor against my country."

The colonel was a gray mustached old fellow with a red face. Well, he got pale, blinked his eyes for a minute. He hesitated, then stiffened.

"Take away the condemned man . . . Next case."

I followed Jules back to jail and they let me go in with him. All day, we talked. We even played cards. I would look at him and try to think that the next morning I would see him tied to a post, killed like a dog. It did not seem possible.

He grew nervous at nightfall, and cried a little during the evening. I could not think of much to console him.

"Paul," he said, "I don't hold a grudge against the colonel and the others on the court. They've been told to bear down. But Mastreck—he did this to shield himself or to get even with you. Both, maybe. . . ."

"Listen, Jules," I told him, "the captain will try and get you out. He knows that you're not a coward, that you never ducked duty. But if he can't, if you have to go through with it, I'll kill Mastreck myself. I swear it——"

"Don't get into trouble, Paul," he advised.

"What would you do in my place?"

He hesitated a moment.

"I wouldn't want you to—for me. . . ."

"It wouldn't be murder. It's execution!"

The word reminded him of what was coming and he grew white again. His thin hands twisted all the time. If you've ever seen anyone you love do that, you can understand. But what could I do? The whole Army was against me. So we sat, choked—and tried not to break down. He was afraid of showing up with his eyes red. We didn't talk much after that. The hours dragged and rushed all at once. Each time the sentries changed we thought they were coming for him.

AT THREE, a lieutenant I didn't know came in. He said my captain had sent him to get me. There was a chance of an appeal. We would go together to the nearest town where there was a divisional general with power to stay the execution. That cheered us both up, and Jules laughed when we embraced.

"That was a close call, Paul!" he shouted after me when the door of his cell closed.

We started out on foot, the lieutenant and I. I asked him why we could not get an automobile. He said there was plenty of time, that if we did get the stay we'd rush back in a car in ten minutes. We walked and walked, six or seven miles, I think. Suddenly he halted.

"Gergeau, your captain asked me to get you out of the way," he explained. "He would not consent to your seeing it. There is no hope of saving your brother, no appeal from a court-martial's decision. He up—you're too far to get back in time."

I could have killed him where he stood. I believe I did strike him, though I saw him later and he never said a word about it. Then I was running on the road, which was muddy and all rutted. Usually you had to leap aside every few seconds to let trucks go by. That morning not one passed going my way. I sweated and panted and ran on. I wanted Jules to see me standing there, sharing it with him. I knew he'd look for me.

Suddenly a short volley crashed out in the haze ahead. I fell on my knees as if I had been hit by a bullet. Right away I heard the band playing as the company marched by, loudly, with a lot of pom-pah.

I was too late, Lieutenant, too late!

There was no longer any reason to hurry. I dragged myself toward the village. There, I saw a few men going back to their shelters, men of another battalion. They didn't know me. They were all pale with nervousness. One, a thin fellow with a yellow drooping mustache, was crying and sobbing. He had thrown his rifle down and yelled against the War, the Army, the officers, everything. The rest were looking around uneasily and trying to keep him quiet.

They spotted me, saw where I was coming from. They talked at me all at once, wanted to share their horror with someone else.

"Just a kid, I'm telling you. They wanted him to kneel so they could tie him to the post. He wouldn't. Wouldn't let them blindfold him, either. He smiled all the time."

"It was awful. Good God!"

"The firing squad was jumpy, fumbled with their rifles. Then he fell on his face. His hands were tied behind him; and they fluttered, skinny white hands. . . ."

". . . As if he were waving good-by to us."

"You say his hands fluttered?" I asked of them.

"Sure! Don't seem to mean much to you. It's nothing to you that they kill boys around here, eh?"

"It's nothing to me," I said, laughing, "he was only my brother."

That shut them up and they let me go. Jules had already been taken away, but I looked at the little pole when I passed by. I must have looked insane because my comrades wouldn't let me near a rifle. They even took away my bayonet. They were afraid I'd kill myself. I wasn't thinking of that.

Mastreck avoided me. I would see him at the end of a street, walk toward him, and he would run off. Actually run. The men all hated him, for they suspected that between me and him, he was the liar. They told me even the captain had cursed him plenty.

We had to meet sometime.

I caught him as he was leaving a café. He fought back hard, and he was a powerful man. But he didn't feel any stronger than a child to me. I got him down, rapped his head on the cobblestones, and I could feel the life rustling in his throat beneath my fingers. His eyes were bulging, his face violet, when my friends pulled me off.

He was my superior and the scene had been public. I was arrested and held for court-martial. It was in the schoolhouse and the same colonel presided. I saw that he recognized me.

"Here I am!" I yelled at him. "Here's another one to murder!"

The old man did not get angry. The loose flesh on his cheeks was gray as stale dough, and he looked at me steadily until I quieted down. I could see in his eyes that he had gone through hell more times than I. It was not easy for him, I guess, to send young men to death. He was obeying orders, as Jules had told me. Orders were to bear down for the sake of discipline. He bore down. But not with me.

"Case dismissed," he snapped. Everyone gasped, for I had done enough to be shot. He may have realized that I had told the truth and Mastreck had lied. It was too late to bring Jules back, but he could ease up on me. The *adjudant* was transferred from our regiment the following day. No one could stand him around and no man would do a thing he ordered. You could not order a hundred soldiers shot, even then. He left, and no one felt like weeping save myself. I was not sure I'd meet him again.

In line or at rest, whenever I saw a new outfit near ours, I'd snoop around and ask for him. But the War ended without my laying eyes on him. I went home. My father had died years back. The news of Jules' finish—there are always kind people to supply details even though the Government just informed her that he was dead—had killed my mother. The shop was dusty, and an unfinished dresser top of ebony, carved by my brother, was where he left it, gripped in the vise. I locked the door and left. I have never been back.

MASTRECK was a professional soldier; therefore he had not been demobilized. I heard that he was on the Rhine with the Army of Occupation. When I reached the town he had moved away. I kept looking for him, but with the shifting that went on to get the country back to a peace basis he stirred quicker than I could follow.

All the time, I was drinking more than was good for anybody. Nearly five years petting a rifle had not improved my ability to handle other tools. It was hard to get work. I was pinched for vagrancy many times, slept in lockups from Alsace to Marseilles, across to Bordeaux, up to Rochefort. It did not matter. I was growing warm, as they say in the kid's game.

Then I thought of a way to locate him. By this time he must be an officer, therefore mentioned in the "Army List." I looked him up. There he was:

> **Mastreck, Jean, Lieutenant, Knight of the Legion of Honor, assigned with the Fourth Battalion, Fourth Foreign Regiment, stationed in Syria.**

I enlisted in the Legion the same day. But instead of being sent to the Fourth Regiment as I asked, I was sent to the Second which needed recruits. After a short period of training, I went with a replacement detachment to the Tonkin. All the three years and two months I was there I addressed petition after petition to be sent to the Fourth Regiment.

At last I was transferred to Morocco, where I met you, Lieutenant. I was a pretty disreputable soldier when you first saw me, I guess; bad notes, drunkard, and all the rest of it. You bucked me up and made me a corporal. I don't know why. You spoke to me every day. I made friends with the other men. I stopped drinking. There were whole weeks when I did not think of Mastreck.

You had me promoted to sergeant, you trusted me, you gave me special work—training the men to shoot because I was an expert rifleman. You hinted that if I'd study nights you'd see that I was assigned to St. Maixent School to pass the test for commission. Life was starting again for me. I recalled that there were officers like you.

Then Captain Mastreck arrived to take charge of the company. I knew him the moment he got out of the auto that brought him. And he knew me. It was after that I started to slip. You were pretty well disgusted with me and I don't blame you. Yet you managed to cover up my worst scrapes. When I turned in a rotten score in rifle competition to spite the company commander, you knew I had done it deliberately. You bawled me out good that time and got ready to wash your hands of me. You could not know why I was acting like that.

Here are my reasons: You had pushed me forward, and if I killed him you would have looked foolish before the chiefs. They would doubt your judgment of the men forever. It might injure your future. On one side there was what I had sworn to Jules and to myself, on the other there was you. It was easier to get drunk and forget it.

As for the captain, after I refused to call quits I could smell fear on him when I was around. He knew that I was waiting for the chance, knew that I was not afraid of consequences, and wondered why I delayed. Brave as he was in action, he oozed terror twenty-four hours a day. Facing hillmen's knives was one thing, and not knowing when he'd get a bullet through his head was another. Whenever I had occasion to enter the office he would back his chair against the wall and his hands would twitch. It was almost better than killing him.

Then there came news of that scrap in the Middle Atlas—the line of blockhouses blockaded by the Berber mountaineers. Food was giving out; relief had to be sent. The company was ordered out. I pulled up short, as you know, dropped drinking and brooding, did my job.

You, my Lieutenant, who had maps and a general knowledge of what was going on, doubtless understand better than I how Captain Mastreck got into the mess we found him in. I just laid it to his stupidity. I said before that he was very courageous but unintelligent. He proved it that day.

I'LL ALWAYS recall when you brought us to a halt on the edge of that ravine and we could see the lads under Mastreck getting cut to bits across the way, and us unable to help save with rifle fire—the Berbers all around his bunch, in the bushes, and dropping them one by one.

Mastreck was all of eight hundred yards away, but the braid on his sleeves glistened when he moved his arms. He had enough sense to see that his men had no chance in the bushes and so he led them toward that hill crested with boulders, where he thought they could hold out until we could find a way of getting across. Then the Berbers climbed up the slope on the other side and his men were picked off like black bugs on a porcelain plate.

Before long, when he was alone, we all knew why the Berbers wanted to take him alive. To torture him. I've seen men after they've spent a few hours nursed by Berber women. They certainly felt themselves die, no mistake about that. Red hot sickle blades, hot sand poured on the scalp, eyes put out with knives, teeth torn loose one by one. I had raged with the others when we found the bodies or the heads and wished to get hold of those who had done the thing.

This time I was glad. This was so much better than I expected. Luck had trundled me across the earth, teased me, brought me back to Morocco and given me a front seat to behold Mastreck about to be caught and tortured, to see him running about like a cornered rat. No one could ask for more. I had no pity in my heart.

I was afraid he'd shoot himself. But, foolish to the last, he had probably fired his last cartridge. Remember how he dodged and ran from rock to rock, with the brown and blue *jellebas* of the Berbers closing in from above and below? In spite of our fire they kept coming. I noted an odd thing then. Most of the men must have hated him for they seemed to fire from a sense of duty. It seemed as if the Berbers were about to do us all a favor.

You could not know him as we knew

him. You have eaten at the same table, felt a certain solidity of rank. And that's not against you; you're sensitive and you've got a good heart. I don't think you'd let a dog suffer the way he was about to suffer. When you were near me, talking as if to yourself, you really were talking to me. You wanted me to overhear.

"The man who puts a bullet through the captain's head would do him a good turn. . . ."

You knew that, even at that distance, I could put a bullet where I wanted. You didn't want to come right out and suggest that I should. Nothing like that is foreseen in regulations. Shooting a man is shooting him, no matter what the reason.

You mistook my hesitation, thought I hesitated to slay a Frenchman, an officer; perhaps that I feared responsibility. That was not it. A shot would have cut short his anguish, robbed me of some satisfaction.

Finally, you could not stand it any longer. You touched my shoulder, bent your face very near to mine. I remember you looked greenish and sick.

"Gergeau, I order you to shoot him."

I shook my head. Over there I saw the little figure that was Mastreck throw something, probably his pistol, at the nearest Berber. I was sorry I couldn't see his face just then.

"Gergeau, shoot the poor devil, it's a deed of mercy, Gergeau. . . ."

You are under the impression, I fear, that it was friendship for you that made me do it. Because you had begged. And you try to reward me by citing me. I don't want to fool you; you've done too much for me.

Maybe you'll call me superstitious, but to me an oath is an oath. I remembered just then that I had sworn to kill Mastreck. I shouldered my Lebel. It's not aiming with me, it's instinct. Something clicks in my brain when the sights are on the target; something that has nothing to do with the sights or muscles. For a few seconds I struggled. Then I pulled the trigger.

We knew he was dead all right when the Berbers cut off his head and ran off with it. You reached down and shook my shoulder, and your face was relaxed, almost smiling. Mastreck had been very lucky.

The same afternoon, when I took part in the fighting to clear Blockhouse Six, I did no more than any man present. It was kill or get killed. And I wanted to live. When I heard you had cited me for bravery, I figured you were sort of paying me for that shot.

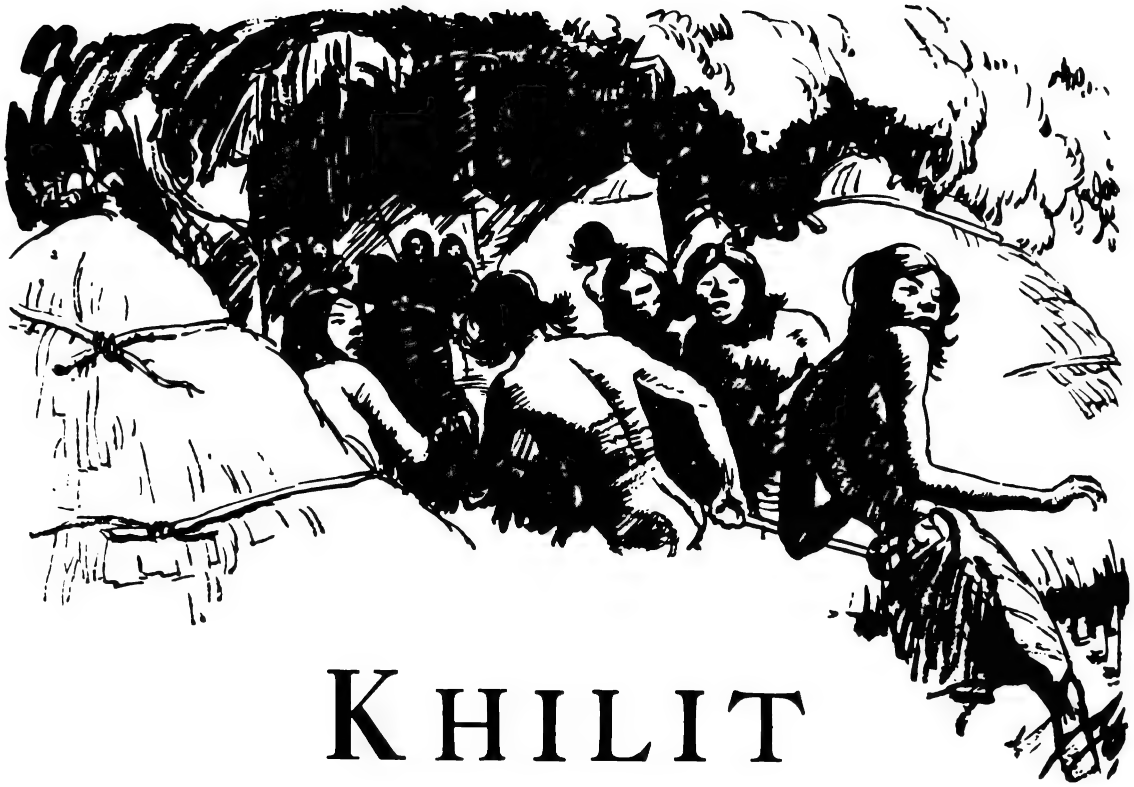
This is a pretty long letter. But you had to know everything, Lieutenant, to get what I meant. Maybe, had I been near you, I'd have told you aloud. I don't think so. I still get sort of wild when I think of Jules and I wouldn't want to make a show of myself before you.

Hoping to join the company soon, I remain, my Lieutenant, yours very respectfully,

Paul Gergeau,
Sergeant in the Fourth Foreign.
Room 5, Cot 9, M. H. Tadla, Morocco.

Lieutenant Delpierre to Colonel commanding Fourth Foreign Regiment, Regimental Headquarters at Meknes, Morocco.

I WISH to reiterate, Colonel, the petition for the Legion of Honor for Sergeant Gergeau, Paul, of my company. This noncommissioned officer had repeatedly given proof of heroism and moral valor over and above duty. His conduct, during and preceding the relief of Blockhouse Six, showed great courage. As Gergeau, Paul, is about to leave the hospital and return to his company, I would like to be able to inform him upon arrival that the request is granted. . . .



KHILIT

By MURRAY LEINSTER

THE moral of this story is that virtue is its own reward, and it should never be printed because it seems to prove that right and justice and worthy young men do not always triumph in this world. Or maybe it proves something else. The ending, at any rate, shows conclusively that something depressing is demonstrated. Turn back to—no. Here's the ending.

When Glover sank to cadging drinks in Singapore, of course he was finished. In Singapore, you understand, a man may be not only down and out, but through. Glover was through when even Gow Lee would not stake him any longer. And after the affair up Khilit way Gow Lee spread out his hands indifferently. If for a moment Gow Lee's eyes raged, his face did not change, nor did his speech. He simply would never again use Captain Glover for any of the gun-runnings, smugglings, or assorted illicit enterprises he might have on hand. And since Gow Lee was the last man who had any use for Glover, when Gow Lee deserted him he was finished.

For a sample, well . . . One night he was cadging drinks in Ryan's place in Singapore—where surely men are not particular—and somebody brought the second mate of the *Camden Town* over to him.

"Are you the man they call Captain Bill Glover?" asked the second mate coldly. He had only had a couple of drinks, and he looked spruce and trim and very fresh-cheeked and wholesome—even in Ryan's place in Singapore. "Are you the man they call Captain Bill Glover?" he demanded again. "Were you up Khilit way a couple of months ago?"

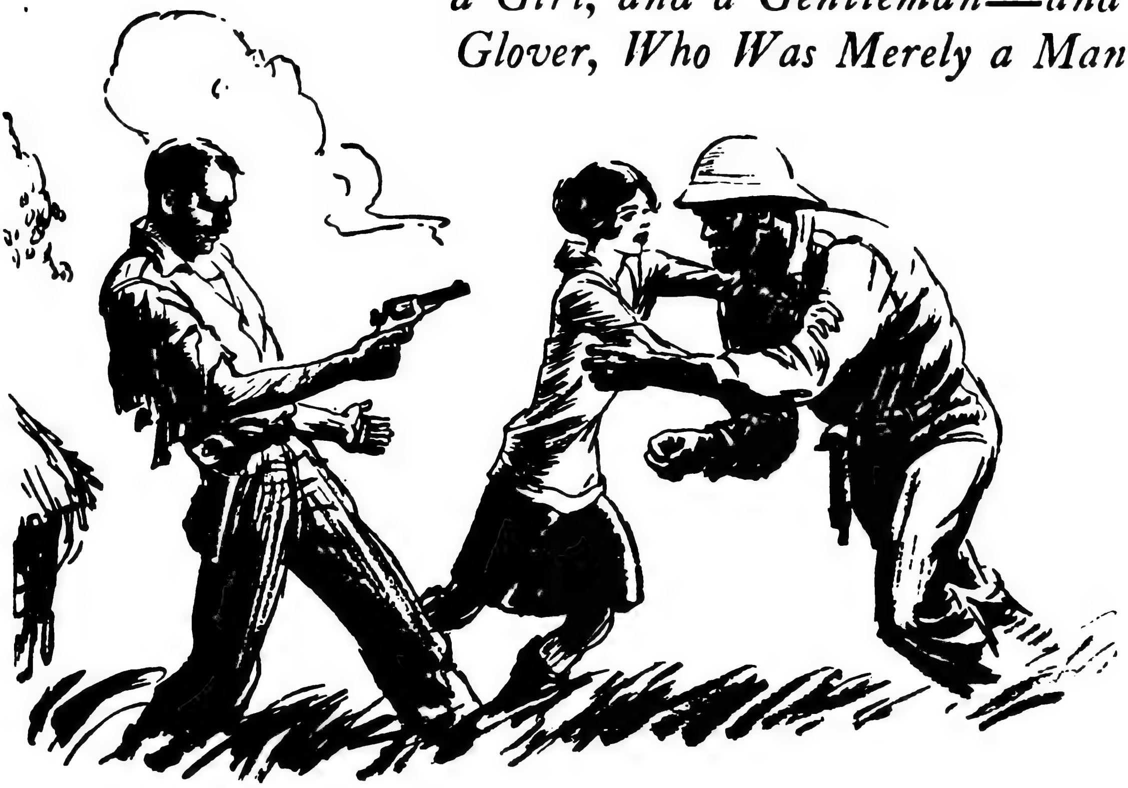
Glover looked up scowling from where he sat by a glass that somebody else had paid for. Never humble, Glover, even when he was cadging drinks. He'd frown and scowl as he asked for them. But somehow people gave them to him.

"Yes," he snapped, scowling. "What of it?"

"You lousy, rotten bum!" yelled the second mate of the *Camden Town*, doubling his fists and swinging with an unholy joy at Glover's face. "Billups was on my ship and I've been hoping to meet you just to bash your damned face in!"

His fist grazed Glover's skull. Glover had dodged from pure instinct. Then he stood up and on the instant was cold sober.

A Very Unusual Novelette of the
Malaysian Jungle, In Which Appear
a Girl, and a Gentleman—and
Glover, Who Was Merely a Man



And he beat the second mate of the *Camden Town* until two men had to carry him down to the boat landing, to be put on board. And then he sat down again, with people looking at him queerly, and finished his drink, and presently was cadging them again.

That is not a nice ending for any story, because it is depressing. And besides, it seems to prove that right and justice and praiseworthy young men do not always triumph in this world. The second mate was praiseworthy, and Glover was not. And right and justice were undoubtedly far from Glover's side in the whole affair. This story should not be printed at all, because of its depressing moral. Consider:

II

THE first of the rains struck after the canoes had been hauled out and turned bottom up in the jungle. The men were half a mile along the jungle path when far off and far away a dull, booming roar set up. It drew nearer and grew louder. There was a racing patter-patter-pattering sound running ahead of the drumming roar. It swept close, and suddenly there were huge, widely spaced warm raindrops falling all about. It swept past and the roaring noise came booming on, growing louder and louder until it drowned out every other noise in the world. Then the rain fell.

It poured down in sheets, in cataracts, in solid masses. In seconds, every living thing within the jungle was dripping wet. The great green leaves of the noisome things that grow rankly toward the sky thrust themselves out eagerly to drink in the moisture. The long lianas uncoiled fresh green tendrils in the saturating rain. Moulds and fungi sprouted and waxed monstrous almost while one watched. The creeping and crawling things slithered stickily through the trash upon the ground, making for their holes. The four-footed animals grew soaked and unhappy. The gray monkeys gathered in shivering, querulous groups in the treetops. And over all, and through all, and drowning out all other possible sounds, was the steady, monotonous, unvarying drumming of the rain upon the jungle.

Glover pushed himself savagely along a jungle path that was better than most, in that it was only necessary to use a *golok*—a wood knife—once in three or four minutes to clear the way. Behind him trailed the men Gow Lee had assigned him. Suchin Chinese, mostly. The man who brought up the rear was a gigantic specimen, of a vastly different breed from the small and wispy Cantonese who iron the shirts and collars of the Occident. Su Yang and all his followers had learned their trade as river pirates on the Kang-Tze and they were not, let us say, reassuring companions to the meek and lowly. But Glover was not exactly meek.

The rain poured down. It was not possible to see ten yards ahead because of the falling water. It was not possible to keep one inch of skin dry, bcause of the spouting streams from the foliage overhead. And it seemed that upon every projecting leaf along the way there were small and squirming objects waiting for a living thing to touch them that they might fasten upon something with warm blood and wax gorged and fat.

A man stumbled and went down with a crash. He got up again with water pouring off him and little wriggling things settling on his bare flesh. He plucked them off sullenly and went on. Su Yang rumbled a curse at him. Glover scowled and went on.

The smell of wood smoke, damp and choking. A sudden clearing and a little whistle, with naked figures plunging headlong through the rain for the jungle's edge. Crude, uncomfortable shacks of the most temporary possible sort, reeking with wood smoke and crawling with lice. Deserted. Empty. The fires smoldering smokily. The floor logs still warm from bodies that had been lying upon them.

Glover waved his hand.

"We camp," he growled, and crawled into a windowless hut and essayed to warm himself beside its reeking fire.

He heard the clacking talk of his followers and scowled more deeply at unpleasant laughter from them. This was a Sakai village, inhabited by those timid jungle folk who are the true aborigines of Malaysia and are hunted by the Malays for the *gêtah* and other jungle produce they sometimes manage to acquire. Glover's followers had found a store of lumps of *gêtah*, which is gutta-percha and worth acquiring, and they were discussing its division among themselves.

Glover's scowl at overhearing them was not due to exalted notions of ethics—his past record was proof of that—but to a sort of scorn. The Sakai are notoriously timid. They flee to cover at the first sign of any stranger. They had fled at the mere approach of Glover and his men. And Glover despised weaklings too much to rob them.

The smoke strangled him in the filthy hut. The fire but insufficiently warmed him. The monotonous booming drumming of the rain filled all the air. He waited for food to be brought him. He ate it distastefully when it came. He smoked. And he was annoyed when Su Yang crawled through the entrance of the hut to speak to him.

"Well?" said Glover sourly.

"We catch 'em missionary station maybe one hour, maybe two," Su Yang informed him. He regarded Glover unpleasantly. There were times when it galled him to be under the orders of any other man, and especially a white man. "Gow Lee told me tell you don't try fool gentleman chop."

Glover's scowl grew deeper.

"Don't try the gentleman stuff, eh?" he demanded. "Now, what in bloody hell made Gow Lee get that idea in his head?"

Su Yang shrugged with something of insolence.

"Pu chih tao?" Then he grinned unpleasantly. "Gow Lee says you were gentleman once. Maybe you break out gentleman again. And he says kill you if you do."

"Ah!" said Glover coldly. "So I was a gentleman once, and I'm to be killed if I turn gentleman again, eh?"

Su Yang nodded, regarding him with insolent almond eyes. His hand tucked itself in the sash about his waist, handily close to a long knife stuck there. Su Yang's revolver was not in sight.

Glover inspected him coldly. The white man must maintain the white man's supremacy always. Sixty miles from the coast, with half a dozen Chinese ex-river pirates as followers, and with the kidnaping of a white girl as an errand, a white man must maintain the white man's supremacy or prepare to find the white man's inferiority both uncomfortable and dangerous.

Glover growled inarticulately, looked

t his pipe and reached to the fire. He pulled out a smoldering brand, held it to his pipe bowl, and puffed. And then he swung about and flung the flaming brand savagely in Su Yang's face.

Su Yang screamed and clawed at the burning stuff. He flung it madly away, grabbed at the knife in his sash—and was looking into the muzzle of Glover's revolver.

"Let me tell you something," said Glover, without pretense of politeness and strictly between his teeth. "Gow Lee can tell you what he damned well pleases, but while you're under my orders you'll do what I say. And I won't have any lousy, yellow scum telling me what I'm to do. Understand it?"

Su Yang snarled at him, rubbing at the scorched places on his face.

"I'm a white man," said Glover truculently, "and you're a blasted yellow swine. And what I say goes! Also, if you try to kill me I'll make you curse your mother for bearing you, before you die. Now—" his tone was deadly gentle—"am I in charge of this party or have you orders to take it over?"

Su Yang snarled once more. But the snarl was a surrender.

"Get to hell out," said Glover coldly, "and have the men ready to go on in five minutes. Line 'em up outside and tell me when they're ready."

He turned back to his pipe as Su Yang crawled out of the tiny doorway.

THE rain drummed on the jungle all about. It was a constant, monotonous, booming roar. It filled the ears and the brain and all one's consciousness. All the world was a place of running water. The very game trails were rippling brooks by now, and the leaden skies poured down water and more water, and yet more water, and might continue so for days on end.

Glover growled inarticulately to himself. Gow Lee was afraid of his turning gentleman? Afraid of his throwing down his job? He'd never failed the old swine yet, and he'd done dirtier jobs than this one for him. And never got more than a two week's blowout in Singapore out of it, either. Gow Lee had no right to complain if he did turn gentleman, damn him.

It was a dirty job. A girl up in the hills, a missionary's daughter, left a fortune by a pious uncle back in England. Cables coming to Pahang about it. Gow Lee getting wind of it. A runner had started up with the cables. And that runner was rotting under some mound of jungle stuff now, if the kites hadn't found him. Gow Lee was a damned cold-blooded yellow rat. He'd sent Glover up to kidnap the girl. Maybe ransom, maybe marriage, maybe . . . Glover growled, all by himself in the filthy Sakai hut with the first of the rains drumming thunderously on the jungle foliage all about.

Su Yang appeared, snarled that the men were ready to go on, and vanished. Glover scowled more deeply and filled his pipe again.

A nasty mess, all around. Su Yang was feeling his oats. He'd put across one or two things for Gow Lee and felt he was as good as a white man. Glover's eyes narrowed a little. Su Yang would be pleased to go back and report that Glover had had to be killed, and he'd taken over the job and carried it through. And Su Yang would take advantage of the fact that Gow Lee would ask no questions as long as the girl was brought down to him. A white girl at Su Yang's mercy . . . He'd have that to brag about to his dying day. And he would brag about it.

Glover got up, frowned and kicked his way out of the flimsy wall of the hut. Out into the rain. He laughed as Su Yang moved quickly away from the entrance from which he should have emerged.

"Take that damned *gêtah,*" he ordered contemptuously, "and throw it in the mud."

He watched truculently as his order was reluctantly obeyed. Quite a lot of *gêtah,* these Sakai had gathered. The work of months, it must have been. They had hoarded it, no doubt, to barter timorously with some sharp Malay trader who would come upstream and fleece them with cheap knives and cheaper tobacco and cheapest powder and shot. The Malay would go downstream rich in *gêtah*—a couple of piculs of it at least—and the Sakai would be poor with the worthless stuff he'd foist upon them in exchange. But they'd worked months to get their barter material.

"It'd load my men down," Glover reminded himself savagely. "And Gow Lee pays them to do what I say, anyhow."

He started off, scowling once more, and in seconds was drenched to the skin again with the downpour from the skies.

The path they followed was a game trail, widened and kept passable by man. In the hinterlands of Malaysia there is a sort of tacit agreement between man and beast concerning trails. Man takes right of way over all beasts but the Striped One, who does as he pleases. But man uses the trails by daylight only. Beasts hold the trail undisturbed from sunset to sunrise—and man sets nó traps on the trail.

There were no beast tracks on the jungle path, however, even when it ceased to wind and wander to keep to the lower levels and went climbing steadily upward. The rain had washed all such traces of the compact away. And of course the Sakai leave no tracks anywhere. That is partly instinct, and partly an hereditary knowledge of the Malays, who have hunted them for generations and only lately have ceased to hunt them for slaves in order to take up the possibly less charitable practice of hunting them to trade with them.

Glover plodded doggedly on, with the downward running water rippling up over the toes of his boots as he forced himself up, and up, and up, along the meandering way. He looked at his compass from time to time, but that was habit. There was nothing he could do but follow the jungle path, stooping under some of the massive creepers that soaked up the falling water avidly, stepping over others growing feverishly across the path, and occasionally hacking through some new grown stuff which barred the way.

And all about him was falling rain and dripping foliage, and below him was soaked and saturated mud, and above him was the steady, the monotonous, the maddening drumming of the rain upon the jungle.

It was two hours of steady climbing before he reached the mission station.

The game trails went through thinning jungle, then. Instead of steady dripping, now and again a beating of unintercepted rain poured down upon him. He heard gruntings behind him. His men were telling one another of near approach to their destination.

THE jungle drew back. A clearing. With mountain flanks rearing up dimly, very dimly, on every hand and vanishing in the gray mist of rain. Nearly invisible patches of crops, planted for the instruction of the Sakai in agriculture, for the filling of their bellies as a prelude to the salvation of their souls. And the mission station.

It was built on poles. The Malay architecture has its utilitarian aspect, and poles do discourage the smaller reptiles. Streaming water from its palm leaf thatch. Dripping water from its wattled walls. Silent, still, desolate.

Glover's followers swaggered a little. Sixty miles up from the coast, the white man's law does not run. There was no white trader, no white official, in very many miles. The only human beings in the jungle were Sakai, who run away when any other man of any other race frowns at them. This dreary, dripping building housed just one white man, a missionary, and one white woman, his daughter. Glover's followers envisioned themselves as brave marauders. . . .

They halted before the desolate little mission. The pungent, suffocating odor of wet wood burning fitfully came to their nostrils. There were jests, more pungent than the wood smoke. Laughter. Knives came out. Su Yang was talking in a low tone.

Glover scowled at him and jerked out his revolver. He shot Su Yang neatly through the forearm, without any warning whatever.

"Next time," he said savagely, "it'll be through the head. I'm running this! And you might tell your gang, Su Yang, that next time one of them listens to you advising that I be killed and the girl shared among you, I'll kill him, too."

Su Yang was cursing volubly in the particularly flexible vocabulary of a Chinese river pirate, which includes the dregs of practically all known languages. Glover looked at him and said gently:

"Are you going to keep quiet?"

He shut his lips abruptly, snarling soundlessly. And Glover faced about in the pouring rain and shouted.

There was no answer. No movement. The missionary station dripped water, and coming from it vaguely there was that bitter, unpleasant smell of wet wood burning reluctantly.

Glover shouted again. This time he thought he heard a voice murmuring quietly. But there was no answer to his hail. With a growled order to his followers to remain where they were, Glover climbed up the tall stairway. This stairway, instead of a ladder, was nearly the only reminder of civilization on the outside of the mission. Reaching the top he thrust his way within.

An empty room, with a homemade table on which there were books and some magazines. Rather pitiful curtains over the windows. A woven cane couch. Damp, limp curtains about a doorway to an inner room. Glover strode through it, scowling savagely—and halted abruptly.

There was another woven cane couch in here. A man was lying on it, very, very still. Glover know what dead men look like; dead men who have died of jungle fever. A girl was rising to her feet, deathly white. She stared at him, and she said unsteadily:

"Thank—thank God! I—I was praying that a white man would come. I—I——"

She reeled a little. Glover caught her in his arms as she went off into a dead faint.

And suddenly, with the girl he had come to kidnap lying utterly helpless and wholly defenseless in his arms, Glover began to curse in a shaken whisper. The language he used was not pretty. He had not learned it in pretty places. But he stared down at the utterly relaxed features of the prettiest girl he had ever seen, and he whispered words the least of which would have filled that girl with an incredulous, horror-stricken terror.

Which, of course, would have been rather ironically humorous. Because the particularly unprintable phrases Glover was using were the indications of the fine and delicate flower of gentility blossoming again in an extremely unlikely place.

III

GENTILITY is a queer thing. There was a young man named Billups being paddled up a certain river not so far distant, moved by motives which he and all the world would have assured you were the motives of an honorable gentleman. He was bound for Khilit, too, though he had started off upon his journey in a wholly different frame of mind from Glover. And Glover would not like Billups at all. Not at all. But then, Glover was not a gentleman. He was moved at the moment by feelings resembling those of a gentleman, but a dockside gutter rat may work his way desperately up to a master's ticket before he loses it for barratry—which amounts, roughly, to arson upon the high seas—and he may even learn to speak grammatical English in the process, but he does not learn to be a gentleman.

With the unconscious figure of the girl he had come up to kidnap lying helpless in his arms, Glover swore luridly. He was conscious of a vast and gusty rage directed against Gow Lee, against Su Yang, and against the universe at large. But he was not conscious of any urge of chivalry, merely of rage.

Therefore he laid the girl down upon the woven cane couch in the outer room, went once more to the veranda, and with his eyes burning redly said:

"Get to hell away from here!"

Su Yang rubbed a burned spot on his face. Someone was bandaging his arm where Glover had shot it. And Su Yang did not feel especially amiable.

"She here?" he demanded sullenly.

"Yes, she's here," barked Glover, snarling. "Get to hell away!"

His gun was ready in his hand. He looked to be, as he was, in a killing mood. Su Yang stared up at him, smoldering flames behind the opaque pupils of his eyes.

"Her father?" he asked sullenly.

"Dead!" snapped Glover. "D'you hear me, you scum? I said get to hell away!"

There was the fraction of an instant's hesitation. Then Su Yang snarled a comment under his breath. Grins blossomed suddenly upon the yellow faces of Glover's almond-eyed followers. A man cackled. Another man tittered. Others roared.

Glover went sick with rage. But one white man cannot kill seven men with one revolver—not ex-river pirates of the stamp of these.

Su Yang snarled, but for the moment Glover's hold was supreme. He stood upon the veranda of the mission station, sixty miles from the coast, with the heavy first rain of the wet season pouring down upon him. His eyes were blazing and his face was deadly.

Six of the seven men picked up their loads and went on, laughing. They trooped toward a shed some hundred yards from the house. They sheltered themselves beneath it, having on the way flung back pungent jests at the white man who led them and who wished to be alone with the white girl they had all come to kidnap, and whose father—her only protector—was dead.

Su Yang remained, gazing up at Glover. Not with open insolence, of course. He'd had two lessons today. But gazing up at him with blank eyes that held no expression whatever, with the rain dripping down his body.

"Go with the others," snarled Glover. "I'm handling this!"

Su Yang continued to stare. Ugly thoughts revolved behind his bland, expressionless eyes.

Glover raised his weapon.

"I'm handling this!" he repeated in sudden strangling rage. "Gow Lee don't care, so long as she gets down to the coast. Get to hell over there before I kill you!"

Su Yang turned and plodded after the others. Glover's breath hissed between his teeth. He flung his revolver shoulder high and sighted on Su Yang's broad back. Then he hesitated and lowered it.

"Make the others suspicious," he told himself, holding himself calm with a tremendous effort. "Got to hold 'em quiet until night."

He was trembling with many varied and vehement emotions. Rage was predominant. But it was a peculiar rage. He was muttering:

"Damn him to hell! Warning me not to be a gentleman! By God, I'll show him if I can be a gentleman!"

He turned and went into the mission again. He carefully put his revolver away, remembered, and jerked out the one empty shell and put in a new one.

"Got to get through that damned jungle path—somehow," he was mumbling savagely. "In the dark. I'd give something for a flashlight. Smash the canoes and go downriver with her. . . ."

He was inside. The girl was sitting up. Blue eyes were staring at him from a face that was as white as chalk.

"I—I heard you!" she said in a peculiar, hoarse whisper. "I—I heard you!"

Glover scowled from pure instinct.

"Forget about it," he said harshly. "You're all right. I'm going to take you down to the coast."

He moved forward to look at the still figure on the couch in the inner room. The girl made a desperate movement.

"I—I'll shoot!" she gasped.

She had a little revolver pointed waveringly at him. Glover laughed unpleasantly.

"You don't share Gow Lee's opinion of me," he said sardonically. "He thinks I'm a gentleman. Put that away. I'm going to look at your father."

HIS knee brushed against her skirt as he passed her, and she flinched. But he ignored her. He covered the face of the dead man a moment later and went prowling about the flimsy little structure. He felt her eyes upon him, minute by minute. He growled disgustedly as he found thin walls, flimsy floors, nothing that could stop a bullet.

The girl's face expressed a desperate terror. Gradually, that terror lessened. She caught at a scornful thought for courage.

"There isn't anyone else here," she said coldly.

"I know it," said Glover grimly. "There isn't any cover here, either."

He stared out through the rain. It drummed on the roof. It dripped down the eaves. It made a monotonous noise that was unspeakably dreary.

"There's nothing to rob, either," the girl told him unsteadily. "Hadn't you better—go on?"

Glover turned and stared at her. Then he laughed.

"Go on? Good God! With those yellow devils out there in the shed?"

She was deathly pale, but somehow she felt no menace to herself in his presence.

"You brought them here."

"You ought to thank God," he said savagely, "that I'm the one who did. Su Yang might have come alone."

He paced up and down scowling. From time to time he looked out at the shed beneath which his followers had taken refuge. He looked at his watch.

"It won't be dark for hours," he muttered. "They'll be suspicious before then . . . Here. Let me see that gun of yours."

He held out his hand. She drew back, and her hand closed more tightly about it.

"Now's about the right time," he said impatiently. "Give it to me!"

She drew away still farther. His arm shot out like lightning. There was a tiny struggle, a wrenching, and a little cry from the girl. She shrank back in renewed terror as he examined the weapon. Her eyes were wide, were terror-struck again.

He looked at the bore of the little gun disgustedly and tossed it back.

"It's no good," he said savagely. "It's a toy! God—" He caught himself in the middle of a lurid phrase. "I've got to stand them off with my own. If that'd been any good I could have gone over to the shed and wiped them out . . . Look here!"

Her hand closed over the little weapon again. She stared up at him.

"I want you to scream," he said shortly. "Scream at the top of your lungs. Some of 'em will come over, to gloat. And I'll shoot them. Then I'll go get the others."

She swallowed.

"Why—why?"

"Why? Good God! Do you want to go downstream in their hands? I've got to kill the damn—" Again he caught himself. "Don't be a fool! Scream!"

She made no sound, staring at him. He flew into a rage.

"Don't you see I'm trying to save you from the devils? Do you think those yellow fiends came upstream for fun? Do you think they came straight here by accident? Scream!"

Still she stared, voicelessly. He reached out his hands toward her. She brought the little gun unsteadily into line. With a growl, he flung it aside. He shook her, brutally.

"If—if I s-start to scream," she chattered suddenly, "I—I w-won't be able to s-stop!"

He released her as she fought off hysteria. She rocked back and forth on the couch for minutes, biting at her lips, stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth to choke back an outcry.

The rain fell steadily. Monotonously. The plashing of waters and the hurried drip-drip-dripping of the eaves was the only sound. But a plank creaked suddenly, somewhere. The flimsy flooring was giving under the strain of a man's weight.

Glover whirled about and savagely began to shoot through the wall, out to the veranda. A man screamed and there was the crash of a body leaping down to the earth. Then padding footsteps fleeing into the mist of rain.

Glover's face was the face of a devil incarnate as he went snarling after his bullets. He came back, seconds later, glistening with wet.

"They know everything now!" he raged. "Everything! Oh, damn them all to hell!"

He forgot to curb his tongue this time. He was shaking with rage, purple with his wrath.

The girl had been frightened into composure by the shots.

"What—what do they know?" she asked in a peculiar, brittle calmness. "What have they found out?"

"They've found out, by God!" panted Glover with burning, rage-enkindled eyes. "The lousy yellow curs have found out that I'm a gentleman!"

And he beat his fists together in a helpless fury.

IV

THE clouds broke just at sunset—the same sunset, by the way, which saw the bow of Billups' canoe turned in to the last small Malay village upstream. Billups was bound for Khilit, too, as you know, and he was a very different sort of person from Glover, as the village where he landed and slept soundly was different from the little mission station.

Up there, for five minutes before the sun vanished below the jungle to the west, vivid carmine rays spread out over the whole world. The green things were made unbelievably green, and glinted ruby colored lights from the wetness that still coated them. The shadows were unbelievably dark, and filled with strange colorings. The jungle glistened like a jewel studded carpet toward the edge of the world. The wet mountain flanks seemed like green velvet hangings shot with gold and draped downward from the sky. The clouds still lowered blackly overhead, but the rain had stopped.

Glover stepped out upon the veranda, and a shot spat out viciously from a garden patch where Indian corn grew tall and rank as an example to the aboriginal Sakai. Glover ignored it. There were no rifles among his erstwhile followers, and no Chinese has yet qualified as a marksman with a revolver at over a hundred yards.

He stared grimly about him. The incredible greenness, the luxuriant verdure that surrounded him, went unnoticed. He was picking out a route toward the jungle path from which he had emerged that day.

The girl's golden head peered out of the door. She came out. He snarled at her.

"Get back inside!" he ordered savagely.

She faced him defiantly. He took her two arms and thrust her within. High pitched yells came from half a dozen spots. Leering, untranslatable yells. They were mocking and envious, and full of the peculiar humor of the Chinese river pirate, which is always Rabelaisian and sometimes even more racy. Glover snarled to himself. Without especial hatred, these men now expected to kill him. There was no more pretense of respect. They would kill him casually, as a part of the task they had been set. Not Su Yang, of course. Su Yang hated him now with a corrosive venom, but it would be the others who would be hard to handle. Su Yang would be blinded to the need of caution by his frenzy for revenge.

The sun vanished. The multitudinous jewel-like glitterings went out like so many lamps. The jungle and the mountain flanks went dark and green and mysterious and deadly. And suddenly it was night.

Glover stared upward. Just above the mountains to the east the clouds were vaguely lighter. Watching, a slow turmoil became noticeable in the dark masses of vapor. The clouds were moving, and the moon rode high.

He went back into the mission, growling. The girl had struck a match to light a tiny kerosene lamp. Her fingers trembled a little as Glover came in.

"Put out that light!" he ordered harshly. "Get something dark on. We're going to try to get through."

"Get through?" she asked uncertainly.

"Down to the coast," he growled impatiently. "We've got to get started before those yellow devils try rushing the house. If we can make the jungle path, we're all right—maybe. The moon will be out in a few minutes. We've got to get to the jungle before it begins to shine."

"But—" she swallowed—"my father, there——"

"We've got to leave him," said Glover brutally. "No time for funerals now."

They were talking in pitch black, utter darkness. The first match had gone out. She struck another, with fingers that shook.

The light flared up, and in its wavering glow the flimsy little mission station looked queerly dark and sinister. And Glover's face was harsh and savage and by no means reassuring. The girl's golden hair, though, and her fair white skin, showed vividly. Her lips were made oddly blood red by the matchlight glow. Her dress was torn a little at the throat.

She was, as Glover realized quite forcefully, very, very beautiful. Her blue eyes were staring into his.

"But—my father," she said unsteadily "We—can't——"

He put his hand upon hers and shook the match into oblivion. He held her hand fast.

"We've got to!" he said grimly, his whole body pounding with his heartbeats, "I tell you, we've got to get away from this house . . . ."

It was utterly dark in there. Glover's voice went harshly into sheer nothingness. He could see nothing; hear nothing. He could feel only a soft warm hand caught firmly in his own and tugging for escape, and the indefinable warmth of another body near his own. It seemed as if he felt the quick, rhythmic beat of her breath upon his throat, as though she had turned to stare desperately through the blackness toward him.

"But I— but I—" She was in terror once more.

There was a crash underneath the house. A man had stumbled over something, down below there among the posts that held the building above the ground.

The silence became ear cracking, then. Glover put out his other hand and caught her shoulder. He drew her closer to him. She gasped faintly and began to struggle.

"Be still!' he whispered savagely. His mouth went close to her ear. His whisper after that was barely a breathing sound, just audible to an ear inches only from his lips. "Get on top of something. A trunk, maybe. Don't move. They'll be trying to crawl in, everywhere. They'll be shooting up through the floor. Be still. If they get you, I'll be dead."

He was silent. He released her. He seemed to cease to exist.

IT WAS pitch dark and utterly still. The blood seemed to pound in one's ears. Then quite suddenly, exactly as if someone had opened a thick door, the sounds of the jungle began. Slow, steady drippings, audible for an astonishingly long distance. The cries of insects. Little rustlings of leaves. A very long distance off, the scream of something that was being killed by something else. The tall Indian corn rustled its leaves, a hundred yards away.

The square windows suddenly became visible. A faint bluish light was illuminating the world outside. The moonlight was coming palely through an opening rift in the heavier clouds.

Silence. Stillness. The furtive, beastly small noises of the jungle. Utter silence in the house. Then some insect safely ensconced in the palm leaf thatch began to chirp stridently.

A board squeaked. The girl heard a sudden thudding noise in the room in which she was. There was a thunderous explosion beneath the house and the ripping noise of a bullet tearing its way through the planking. A man groaned—where Glover had been.

The girl's teeth chattered, and she stuffed her handkerchief between them to still the noise. The groan did not come again. There was no other sound made by any living thing. Somewhere in the house the ticking of a tiny watch, a woman's watch, burst through the stillness to be thunderously loud. It went on merrily, abstractedly. It was hateful in its oblivious preoccupation.

The girl felt her head turning of its own volition. The squares of the windows were becoming brighter. The clouds before the moon were thinning still more and the windows became starkly rectangular. And the girl saw one of the angular corners becoming blurred. Very, very slowly, a round thing—an inhuman thing—was moving as if to peer within.

Her ears tingled in anticipation of the explosion that should come at any instant. It did not come. It did not come . . . The round thing was peering openly in the window space now . . . The girl felt herself growing cold all over. There was no one to defend her . . . That groan . . .

The rounded thing moved higher. It was very bright outside, now. With a sudden gasp of horror the girl saw that the round thing had no neck. Then her staring eyes discerned the slender pole that upheld the dummy. It had been intended to draw the fire of any living man who might be in the house. And his shot, of course, would guide the fusillade of those beneath the flimsy flooring. But no man had fired at the dummy. Which might mean that the only man able to fire might be dead. . . .

The girl caught her breath in a gasp that was like a moan of pure terror as the thought sank home. She had feared Glover; had feared him horribly. But now the silent, furtive, deadly figures without seemed more horrible still.

She heard the faintest possible noise. An indefinable rustle. Then the tiniest conceivable clatter. Terror sharpened senses said, "Someone has taken off his boots. That clatter was the lace tips on the floor."

She strained her eyes past belief. The dimmest of glows came in through the window from the moonlight outside. There was a bulk somewhere on the floor. She could see it vaguely; could *feel* it somehow . . . It was writhing slowly toward the doorway. Going away from her. Very, very slowly.

She heard the faint scratching sound of a man, climbing, who had slipped and caught himself. They were climbing now. Their dummy hadn't been shot at. They believed they'd killed Glover with that first shot. It had been he who groaned. He was dead . . .

THE writhing dark bulk on the floor moved with infinite slowness from pitch darkness into abysmal blackness. The girl stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth, shaking in every limb, her eyes wide and staring. It seemed that there were other writhing shapes upon the floor. It seemed that there was one coming with a terrible slowness through that other doorway. And one was creeping past the couch on which she sat. Something was going to touch her. Something was going to touch her . . . Something—was—going—to—touch—her. . . .

She screamed. Shrilly. Senselessly. She screamed again.

Something crashed into the wall. She could not stop screaming now, but a detached, cold personality that heard the screams coming from her lips recognized that the succeeding thud upon the floor was made by a boot, flung against the wall to seem as if a man were there.

A yellow spurt of flame crashed out almost over her shoulder, from the other room. In its flash, still screaming, the girl saw Glover, photographically distinct, seeming frozen in the act of springing across the room toward her with his face a mask of savagery.

The flash was gone. Her screams broke off short. She knew Glover was alive.

Before his leap was complete she heard his weapon explode. She felt the wind of the bullet going past her head. Other guns were going swiftly beneath the floor. And with an uncanny distinctness she saw in Glover's gun flash the floor splashing up splinters as men beneath her poured up lead at the spot where the boot had fallen.

Then there was a gasping cry behind her. Glover had swept past, plunging in stockinged feet without sound. The breeze of his passing fanned her. She heard him roar in unutterable savagery. There was a moment's sickening stillness, and she heard him return.

The fusillade from below had stopped abruptly. The men under the flooring had heard him bellowing elsewhere than where they were shooting. They hesitated.

The girl heard the flooring creak. She heard the gasp of a man making some supreme effort. She heard muscles crack, strained to the utmost. Then came a crashing sound, a splintering noise, the senseless squeaking of splintered wood.

The couch on which the girl sat shuddered suddenly. An abrupt cold breath blew upward from below. With a bellow that was wholly animal-like in its bestial fury, she heard Glover spring down.

Then there was pandemonium beneath the house. Shots, cries, screams. The screams were retreating swiftly.

Glover snarled like a wild beast beneath the girl's feet. There was no flooring where her toes had rested. There was a gaping hole in the flimsy planking, through which the dank breath of the night floated up. Glover had broken a hole in the makeshift planking. He had used a man as the hammer with which to smash the thin and brittle wood.

He came up the steps to the veranda again, snarling to himself. He came into the room where she sat. She heard him strike a match.

"Are you all right?" he demanded harshly.

The light flared up. She nodded, voiceless. There was blood upon his face. There was blood upon his hands. She stared at him in the matchlight, unable to speak.

"What're you looking at me like that for?" he asked heavily.

She tried to answer him, but could not. She could only gasp a little.

"What're you looking at me like that for?" he demanded furiously. "I've killed one of the dogs, but it was for you!"

He went into a rage as she continued to stare wordlessly at him.

"By God! Looking at me like that! I'll show you!"

He seized her arms and dragged her to her feet, facing him. One of her hands went to her throat. It was swollen. Choking. Words would not come. He flung down the match.

"Looking at me like I'm scum!" he roared into the darkness. "All right! If I'm scum, I'll act like it!"

He crushed her to him. Her whole body was limp, incapable of resistance. She felt herself pressed close, felt his lips savagely upon hers, felt herself being kissed furiously, passionately, desperately . . . Then she felt herself pushed roughly away.

"You shan't come the toff over me!" he snarled. "By God! You shan't come the toff over me!"

She heard him padding savagely into the next room in his stockinged feet, looking for someone else to kill.

V

FAR, far away, there were clouds over the jungle toward the coast. From these clouds rain was falling in a steady flood. The edge of the world was blotted out by a gray mist that fell straight down from those lowering clouds. But that was many miles away.

The sun was shining on the mission station of Khilit, and upon the jungle around the mission, and upon the little patches of grain and vegetables that were to have been the opening moves in a campaign to bring the Sakai into the fold of those who love the Christian God. Filthy little folk, the Sakai. Very nearly the vermin the Malays consider them. But when their bellies are full—which is rarely—they are reasonably happy. People are that way.

In the sunlight the mission was no longer a dreary, dripping, sodden hut. It was a cheery and colorful little house, made bright with flowers and with desperately gay little curtains at the windows. It was a Malay hut, built so by design for the encouragement of the Sakai to architecture. Futilely, of course. The missionary would done just as well in a comfortable house. But theories are stubborn things to combat, especially when a Foreign Mission Board has decided that the conversion of the heathen is advanced by the adoption and adaptation of native customs of housing and diet by its missionaries. Fortunately, the Boards rarely see a picture of a Sakai hut, and never even hear of the Sakai dietary. Even the theory might be shaken by a suitably authenticated report on the nourishing content of the various grubs and beetles which supplement the Sakai ration.

The flowers blossomed hugely. The garden patches were vividly green, and save for lesser vegetables that had been beaten flat by the first of the rains, seemed flourishing and proud.

Glover sat on the veranda, brushing partly dried mud from his trouser legs and body. He scowled as he desisted long enough to fill his pipe and light it.

"You needn't worry about those men as long as I'm alive," he said truculently. "Not at all. Until I'm killed, the yellow devils won't dare try anything."

He made no reference to the mud upon his clothing. He ignored forcefully the task upon which he had been engaged. There had been a funeral of sorts, and there was no longer a man dead of jungle fever on one of the couches inside the house.

The girl looked white and tired. Horrors can crowd too closely to hurt.

"I wish, though," growled Glover, "those d—those Sakai would turn up."

The girl spoke tiredly.

"They're very timid. It took father a long time to make friends with them. And some of the very wild ones never did come near."

The Sakai are timid. They've been hunted for all of fifty generations by the Malays, and they are as wild and as scary as hares. A Sakai man can be sleeping soundly by a stream edge, and the dip of a paddle twenty yards off will waken him and he will have vanished into the jungle before the stroke can be repeated. And then you can try to find him.

Glover scowled at his need of such animals. He'd seen Sakai. Stunted, wizened little men, scabrous with some skin disease and unbelievably naked. He'd been told that they were so poverty-stricken, even in language, that they had no words for numerals higher than three. Those who could count up to the brain cracking total of ten were forced to use Malay words for the numbers. And there were Sakai in the jungle all about. Undoubtedly.

"One was here last night," said the girl suddenly. "Probably Pa A'Gap."

Glover stared at her and growled incredulously.

"He left a sign for me," said the girl slowly. "Seven blow gun darts, pointed in every direction. They were smeared with *ipoh sap*. That's the Sakai poison, you know. One of them was broken."

Glover grunted. It was clear enough, though not easy to believe. There were six men with Su Yang. And one, at least, he had killed. When he had broken through the floor with him. That man was the broken dart. Darts meant danger, of course. Blown from long, flimsy reeds the Sakai use, the darts are dangerous. The Sakai kill birds and small game with them even unpoisoned. But they do not dare to hunt men.

"I didn't see the little beast," growled Glover.

She stared.

"You were awake all night?"

Glover shrugged, frowning. He had been, of course. Su Yang wouldn't leave while the girl was here. He wanted the girl, both for himself and to deliver her to Gow Lee. His own possession of her would be something to boast of. Her delivery to Gow Lee would produce a reward. Su Yang wouldn't leave on those accounts alone. But especially Su Yang would not leave while Glover still lived. Not now. He would not leave until Glover was dead, and by preference in some ghastly and lingering fashion of his own contriving. So Glover had to watch.

"Seven darts, one broken," Glover growled. "That means six men to look out for. One of 'em's dead."

"There was an eighth dart," said the girl quietly. "It was pointed toward the house. But that wasn't smeared with *ipoh.*"

Glover grunted.

"That's praise for me, I suppose," he said sardonically.

"It is. What did you do that they know of?"

Glover growled. He was sleepy. But he remembered ordering the *gêtah* his followers were taking from the Sakai village, flung down in the mud again. Eyes must have been watching, then, and it chalked up to his credit. He rumbled disgustedly.

HIS eyes roved frowningly over the vast expanse of jungle down toward the coast. It went on and on, past all imagining. Thick as the jungle was, and deadly, and full of inextricably tangled undergrowth, it was no wonder that the Malays clung to the banks of the streams. The streams are the true highways in Malaysia, and the game trails serve as thoroughfares almost exclusively for the little wild folk who alone slip furtively through the jungle.

A little wisp of vapor trickled out through the massy green of the jungle roof. It spread and grew thicker. It became respectably dense. Something was burning down in there. Glover sat up when he realized what it was. He opened his mouth to swear luridly.

"That's a Sakai village burning," said the girl quietly. "There's one down there. Your—those men haven't traveled far."

Glover snarled, staring at the smoke.

"There are two of them here now," he rumbled. "Hidden in the sugar cane yonder."

He waved his hand, still watching the smoke. There would be no more open fighting, he knew. He had ignored the watchers until now. These were professional fighting men and they would blow his head off casually from behind, or ambush him and send half a dozen bullets at once into his spine—the Chinese killer's favorite target—but they would not fight in the open again where he would have a chance to kill them.

The smoke curled upward. Just as much smoke as would come from the burning of a Sakai village made out of the flimsiest and most temporary of shelters, and no more. Glover scowled savagely.

Then in the infinite silence that sometimes hangs over the jungle in morning sunlight, the thin and muted sound of a shot reached their ears. Just one shot. That was all.

The girl's face paled a little. Glover's lips set tightly and his eyes burned. Glover's expression was not especially gentle, just then.

"They—they've killed somebody," said the girl faintly.

Glover's lips opened to emit a growl that was all profanity.

Over in the sugar cane, someone tried an experimental shot. He had no especial hope of hitting Glover. The shot was more an indication of boredom than anything else. But the bullet tore through the roof of the mission. Snarling, Glover sent a burst of shots at the still hovering wisp of smoke that showed where the shot had come from. A man ran away, crashing through the cane stalks.

Silence fell again. Glover sucked at his pipe. He got up, suddenly, and went swiftly inside to peer out the window at the rear of the mission. He saw nothing. The emptiness of the cleared space annoyed him. He had been sitting on the veranda in hopes of luring someone to make a dash for the house from the rear.

He went back to the veranda.

"I—heard another shot," said the girl unsteadily. "They must be hunting down the poor Sakai."

"Vermin," growled Glover. "No harm if they are killed. If they had the guts of a jellyfish they'd use their blowguns. Potting from behind trees, they could wipe out the yellow devils."

He smoked, scowling, watching the drifting smoke over the jungle. He'd been in that village. The entire population had fled at the approach of strangers. He'd warmed himself beside a reeking fire in a lice ridden hut, and he'd kicked half the side out in emerging, to keep from crawling out the entrance where he'd suspected

Su Yang might be waiting. He, Glover, wouldn't have burned the damned village. He despised the filthy little beasts too much. . . .

THERE was another distant, muted shot. Others answered it. Quite a little flurry of shooting. It was nearer than the first shot had been. It sounded rather as if someone were running down the jungle path, shooting when he had to, running when he could.

Glover took the pipe out of his mouth.

"Now, what the hell?" he asked meditatively of the universe.

The girl was straining her eyes and ears, watching the jungle in a peculiar anxiety, listening in meaningless dread.

"Someone's running away from somebody," she said faintly, looking to Glover for confirmation.

He growled an assent and slipped suddenly into the house. A yell arose from the watcher in the sugar cane. Glover reached the back of the house only in time to see a fleeing figure diving back to cover. He scowled disgustedly. If he'd waited fifteen or twenty seconds more, that yellow scum would have been too close to the mission to get away. He'd have brought him down with a shot in the back . . . .

He heard the next shot off in the jungle, even from the back of the mission. It was a great deal nearer. Very near. A voice screamed something, off behind the wall of jungle trees. Glover went diving to the front. That voice had been Chinese, and if it was a Chinese in flight, Glover might get him as he sped out of the jungle. And if it was someone running from one of Su Yang's amiable companions. . . .

He dusted the earth near where he thought a figure was moving to intercept a fugitive or one of the fugitive's pursuers.

Another shot from the jungle. Near by. At any second . . .

A figure came panting desperately out into the cleared space, dazed and exhausted, its clothes torn in ribbons and its flesh scratched and torn by the jungle thorns. A white man, sun helmet gone, wild eyed and in panic. He ran with sobbing breaths clogging in his throat.

Someone ran to meet him—one of Su Yang's gang. With a roar of fury, Glover flung himself off the veranda and went racing.

Shots spat in the sunlit stillness. Su Yang's follower yelped and plunged for the jungle. He made it. The white man staggered on. Glover waited grimly for more figures to emerge from the trail, but the man who had just dived into cover yelled shrill warning to the unseen pursuers.

Snarling, Glover gave it up. He went back to the mission glowering. The white man was sitting down, panting. The girl was nowhere in sight. With a grunt, Glover plunged inside the hut. But she was quite safe. She was pouring water into a glass.

"Don't go out of sight again," growled Glover wrathfully. "Not without letting me know. Understand?"

The girl nodded. Her hands were trembling a little as she poured out water to carry to the strange white man. She seemed to be trying to hide a strange, overwhelming relief. Glover read her expression all too well. Glad because another white man had come. Glad because there was somebody else around to protect her. To protect her against him! A gusty wrath swept over Glover. He was not a gentleman. He had never been a gentleman. He never would be a gentleman. He snarled savagely at her.

"That's it, eh?"

He went quickly back to the veranda. The other white man was staring slowly about, orienting himself already though the breath still rasped in his throat. Glover loomed above him.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded unpleasantly. "And what the bloody hell are you doing here?"

VI

THERE was instructive hostility developed during the long, hot afternoon between the two white men at Khilit. One, of course, was Glover, whose character was not above reproach and whose past history was not reassuring. The other was First Mate Billups of the *Camden Town*, who was a very praiseworthy young man indeed. But the hostility was rather that of thought than of action. External affairs demanded concerted action, but nothing could make for cordiality.

Su Yang's followers opened up with a

rifle just before sundown and Glover stared at Billups and turned purple with rage.

"That's your rifle!" he raged. "There's nowhere else they could get one!"

First Mate Billups nodded in uneasy composure.

"It was weighing me down when I legged it down the jungle path," he explained placatingly. "I dropped it. I thought they'd string out, chasing me, and I'd pot them one by one as they caught up."

A bullet whizzed through the palm leaf thatch overhead, struck a bamboo joist and smashed it, was deflected in the process and screeched downward to bury itself in one of the heavy timber uprights that held the house off the ground.

"Of all the damned fools!" snarled Glover. "You could have got the bolt out, anyhow! Good God! You damned——"

He flung out of the room, incoherent and beside himself with fury. He had not liked First Mate Billups from the beginning, and the timidly admiring glances he had continually noted the girl giving the newcomer did not add to his admiration. Billups was young, and fresh cheeked, and when he was cleaned up and calmed down he had recovered some of that bland cockiness a youthful merchant marine officer acquired with his first stripe of gold braid.

Glover went out on the veranda, and a bullet cut the air half a yard from his head. He snarled futilely at the marksman, made sure no one was worming a way toward the house, and went back inside.

Billups drew away from the girl as he entered. She cast a frightened glance at Glover. He growled at them both and went into the other room. He reassured himself of the emptiness of the other side of the clearing. He went back to the others, raging.

"That tears it," he said grimly. "That blasted rifle!"

"I don't see what harm it does," protested Billups defensively. "They had guns before, didn't they?"

Glover growled contemptuously at him. He turned to the girl.

"Has *it*—" he jerked a scornful thumb at Billups—"got guts?"

Billups reddened angrily.

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded furiously.

"If *it* has," said Glover savagely, "I want *it* to help me. I'm going to go out there when the light's a bit worse. They'll shoot at me. If it weren't for that damned rifle, I'd be all right. But I'll risk it. I'll drop. They'll come out to me. And I want *it* to kill some of them."

"How?"

"Shoot them," said Glover in a sardonic gentleness. "Shoot them with a pistol. Do you know how to shoot off a pistol?"

Billups bit his lips.

"I didn't come up here—" he began in chilly dignity.

"To fight? I know it," said Glover contemptuously. "But you'll fight them or I'll break your neck between my fingers. Listen to me! When the light's a bit worse I'll start toward the edge of the clearing. I'll shout that I want to make a bargain. You'll crawl along behind me, as much under cover as you can. Get as near as you dare without being seen. They may be fools enough to come out—though I doubt it. If they do, you'll try to kill them. I'll handle those you miss. If they don't come out, it'll be because they'll shoot at me. When they do, I'll drop. Then they'll wait a bit and come out to knife me, especially if I groan a little. You'll kill them. Understand?"

Billups stared.

"You mean," he said incredulously, "you'll go out under a flag of truce and expect me to murder the men who come to parley with you?"

Glover scowled.

"Don't be a damned fool!" he said. "That trick ought to get two or three of them. And we've got to kill them!"

"But it's murder!" said Billups hotly. "Luring men into the open and then shooting them down!"

"Maybe," said Glover sardonically, "it's a legal execution if they ambush us on the trail and kill us."

"I won't do it," said Billups hotly. "I'll kill any man in fair fight, but I won't murder them in cold blood like that!"

Glover stared at him, with death in his eyes.

"And besides," said Billups angrily, "that would leave Alice in the house with no one to protect her!"

Glover's face was very far from a pretty sight. He scowled contemptuously.

"Stay here and protect her, then," he

said sardonically. "I'm going to try it alone. If they get me, maybe you can hold them off long enough for some Sakai to risk slipping up to the house at night. One did that last night. Get him to lead you off in the jungle. There's no other way for you to get clear."

With a growl of utter disgust he turned and made for the door.

IN THE deepening darkness Billups' face went utterly pale. He jumped at a conclusion and acted on it.

"Stop, or I'll fire!" he barked.

Glover whirled, to look into the muzzle of Billups' revolver.

"You know what those devils are here for," panted Billups. "You know the only thing they can want is Alice. There's nothing worth taking in the house—but a white woman! You know they don't care about you. You know if you can get among the jungle trees they won't try to find you. They don't want you! They want Alice! And you're planning to try to make the jungle and get away, leaving her here! I'm up to your tricks, my man! You shan't get away as easily as all that!"

Glover swayed forward as if to spring, his face the face of a devil.

"Stand back," cried Billups shrilly, "or I'll fire!"

Glover's hands were closing and unclosing convulsively. A stream of unspeakable profanity burst from his lips.

"You fool!" he snarled. "You damned fool! You——"

"You're going to stay here," said Billups crisply, "and help hold them off. If they rush the house, they'll kill you, too. You'll have to fight. And I'll take your gun and keep it until it's needed."

Glover crouched a little as Billups moved forward. His hands were curved like talons.

"By God!" he gasped, strangling on his rage. "If you come in arm's length of me I'll kill you!"

He meant it. He was mad with rage, wild with fury alike at the stupidity and the smugness of this young man who had come blundering into this affair with strictly businesslike romantic intentions, and now was posing as a hero. It was growing darker with the swiftness of tropic nightfall. Glover's figure was blurring against the background of the flimsy little room.

He straightened up, containing his rage by a terrific effort.

"I shan't go out," he rasped. "If anything happened to me she'd not be safe with only a fool like you to protect her. But I'm going to take the back of the house. You take the front. Keep those blasted devils from breaking in. She can look and see that I haven't run away when she chooses."

He strode to the rear, stepping across the gaping hole in the floor that he had made the night previous, battering through the brittle planking with the body of a man. He disappeared. There was silence, Billups still instinctively facing the door through which he had vanished, with his revolver ready.

"What a beast!" said Billups shakenly. "If I didn't need him to help fight, I'd let him go and good riddance."

"I don't think he meant to run away," said the girl slowly. "He fought for me rather—splendidly last night."

It was entirely dark outside, now. The furtive little noises of the jungle were beginning. Billups put up his hand and secretly wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"We've got to watch," he said desperately. "It's the devil of a mess, Alice. I—I don't know whether we'll ever see the sunrise. But I'll die fighting for you. And . . . Go and see if he's in the other room, won't you?"

"He's there," said the girl quietly. "Let us watch."

She clasped her hand in Billups' as he took up his post by a window which commanded a good part of the clearing. And when the moon came out, as it did presently, the watching became less tense a business. They could see sharp and vivid shadows, even the sword shaped shadows of individual blades of grass beneath the full, harvest moon.

Considering the location, the atmosphere, and the spice of danger, the night was an ideally romantic one. As time went on and there was no alarm, Billups became tentatively amorous. The amorous tendencies of men, and the susceptibility of women, increases markedly when there is danger in the air. It is a biological law, perhaps. Certainly it is a fact.

But the intentions of Billups were strictly honorable. Strictly.

Glover, though, snarled silently to himself as he watched the edge of the jungle. He hated Billups with a deep and venomous hatred.

"I'd like," he spat to the dark walls about him and stared out at a moonlit world that was pure magic and sheer deadliness, "I'd like to stick a knife in his belly and twist it."

He envisioned the process with a savage satisfaction. But he needed Billups just now. An extra man with an extra revolver was a godsend, even when troubled with scruples or cowardice. The two characteristics, naturally, would be exactly alike in reducing the effectiveness of the reinforcement.

But a good deal of Glover's hatred came from the causes behind Billups' arrival. He'd come up to Khilit to inform the girl of her uncle's death and her own inheritance. His mother had cabled him about the matter, and Glover sardonically understood the motives back of the cable and the journey alike. Billups and Alice, the girl, had been children together. There had even been a time when they looked forward vaguely to marriage. Then Billups acquired a merchant marine uniform with a junior officer's stripes, and lost sight of her in his new absorption in his own importance. But when a canny mother back in England took advantage of the providential presence of her son's ship near the mission station of an heiress, she had cabled him explicitly.

"I know 'em," raged Glover to himself. "A rich wife. A chance for the damned prig to get on easy street."

BILLUPS had started upcountry in that bland cockiness of a personable young man who is about to confer the honor of a proposal upon a girl who aforetime adored him abjectly. He traveled alone, for the romantic effect of one risking his life to bring good tidings to a loved one. A tame Sakai was hired at the last Malay village on the stream, to guide him to Khilit.

Somehow, he'd missed the three Chinese who went down to loot the Sakai village on the trail; to gather up again the *gêtah* Glover had made them abandon. Number One gutta-percha fetches four hundred Straits dollars a picul in Singapore these days. It is worth taking. The Sakai village burst into flames half an hour behind Billups. He was hardly two miles from Khilit when the three Chinese came up in his rear and killed the tame Sakai and painstakingly tried to kill him. They'd seen his bootmarks in the trail and hurried.

Billups got rattled. These men weren't the reedy coolies he knew. They were big men, savage men, fighters. He bolted, at a speed of which he had not known himself capable. Twice they got within shooting distance. Once he fell sprawling over a trailing creeper and had to drive them under cover with his revolver before he could get away to run again. And he'd gotten into Khilit in an awful panic.

That wasn't quite the way he explained the matter. As he told it, his conduct throughout had been the result of prompt, though mature, deliberation. But Glover had laughed unpleasantly when he first told his tale, and he snarled now at the memory.

"The blasted bully!" he growled contemptuously.

Silence from the edge of the jungle. Stillness. The jungle can be utterly still and yet give the feeling of being full of noises one can almost hear. Clear, vivid moonlight shining down. Very, very safe. Nobody could approach the house without being seen. Nobody at all.

The orange spurt of flame from the rifle came again. Again a bullet tore crashingly through the dry, thatched roof. A wait of a couple of minutes, and the rifle went off once more. Again the whine of the bullet. Again the spiteful crackling noise as the missle went through flimsy stuff overhead.

"They're shooting at the roof," growled Glover savagely. "They're covering something. Something!" He moved catlike to the door of the other room. "What's going on?" he demanded.

There was a stirring. Glover's voice was not gentle at any time. And his presence, his air, was never exactly benevolent. What he intended as a crisp inquiry sounded rather like a belligerent bellow.

And it is a biological law that the romantic instincts of both sexes are stimulated by danger. The romantic instincts. And Billups had come up to Khilit in the first place to make honorable proposal of matrimany—being moved thereto by economic motives. And just five minutes before he had made that honorable proposal; his economic motives having been thrust into the background by the immutable law just mentioned. In consequence, Glover's growled inquiry broke into a scene of entirely respectable romantic rapture, and it sounded like the wrathful rhetoric of a jealous male about to commit murder.

"What's going on?" he roared again. He thought, of course, that Billups had neglected his watch. Which, in his preoccupation with romance, Billups had done.

But Billups spoke sternly, and grimly, and with the wild exultation of a man who has just heard the woman he loves confess her love for him.

"I've got a gun trained on you," he said sharply. "And you'll go back and be ready to fight or I'll fill you full of lead!"

And Glover really bellowed then. With a vast and consuming rage. A certain pungent scent had reached his nostrils.

"You fool!" he roared. "You damned fool! They've set the house on fire!"

He plunged through the hole in the flooring, dropping with a crash to the ground beneath. They heard him snarling below. Half a dozen weapons seemed to open upon him, because he would be a good target in silhouette beneath the house with the world all glimmering moonlight.

They heard bullets nicking and nipping at the posts that supported the house. They heard the crash of his revolver.

Then he came scrambling up into the house again, his voice a thick, smothering rumble of pure rage.

"They shot fire arrows," he snarled. "The thatch is on fire. Half the bloody house is burning! And they're waiting outside!"

Billups scented the smoke now. It was rather remarkable that he had not noticed it before. But biological laws sometimes conflict, and the urge to romance sometimes runs counter to the law of self-preservation.

"We've got to break for the jungle," said Billups crisply. "You go first, Glover—so I can watch you. Alice and I'll come next. God knows, we haven't much chance, but we'll try it."

It was a noble speech, and it was romantic, and it was in the best tradition of the merchant marine, whose officers have to think of helpless women sometimes in their charge, and sometimes have to hold down a panic-stricken crew in times of emergency.

But Glover snarled. He crouched down, reaching out. A pause of the fraction of a second, and Billups felt a terrific impact. He went to the floor with the ruins of a flung chair on top of him. Glover hurtled after the chair and wrenched his revolver savagely out of his hand.

"You damned fool!" roared Glover. "Keep still or I'll break your blasted neck!"

And with savage swiftness he bound Billups' hands behind him.

VII

THE girl saw Glover turn away. His bulk loomed huge and strange in the darkness. The only light was the pale glow that diffused in through the curtained windows. Billups bumped clumsily against her. His bound hands touched and caught at hers. She held fast, in a strange blend of hope and terror and the aftermath of the romantic interlude that Glover had interrupted. She was trembling, and the sharp smell of burning thatch stung her nostrils. The window toward the west was glowing a little more brightly than the others. With a faintly reddish glow. There were little cracklings overhead. She clung tightly to Billups' bound hands.

Glover was scooping up small things and cramming them in his pockets. Rock salt, that her father had given the Sakai as presents. Tobacco; trade tobacco, for which the Sakai would sell their souls if they had any. And odds and ends. He was growling to himself, rumbling horrible things. In a towering rage. But moving with a swift purposefulness. The girl watched his vaguely defined form moving about.

Billups' hands tightened upon hers, meaningly. He was saying something in a guarded tone. Something tense and urgent. What was it?

"Let my hands loose!" he was whispering desperately. "Let my hands loose! Quick! I'll kill this beast and we'll make a break for it!"

Her fingers were fumbling with hard knots, even while she was trying to find words to say that he shouldn't kill Glover. The knots were hard, and Billups was impatient. He moved uneasily while she worked at them.

"Quick!" he whispered again, in an agony of impatience. "Quick! Before he. . . ."

Glover was making a strange bundle. Crumpled paper and sheets from a couch. A tablecloth. Another one. He was jerking the curtains from the windows and bundling them together with the door curtains into a loose ball. She could see him working feverishly by the little light that came in the windows. The smell of smoke was stronger. He reached upward and wrenched at the ceiling cloth. It came away with a rotten ripping sound. Dust and scraps of trash came with it. Something landed with a little *plop!* and went scuttling away. The smoke was much thicker now. It was difficult to breathe. The knots were very hard.

The girl gasped as Billups was jerked away. Glover was staring into her face, savagely. A little tongue of flame licked into sight overhead. Its light came down the hole where the ceiling cloth had been pulled away. Glover's eyes were hot with rage.

"I'm handling this," he snapped. "Leave him alone!"

Back to his task. He had thrown Billups furiously against the wall. And Billups was struggling to his feet again, his face at once drawn and desperate and raging.

Glover was striking a match. He held it to a loose, unwieldy bundle of dresses and curtains. The flimsy stuff caught brightly and smoked horribly. He thrust the burning edge against another bundle already prepared. That caught and he was hastening out of sight.

The girl choked upon smoke. Her eyes went searching for Billups. He was looking upward. Three little tongues of flame showed inside, now. Tiny twinkling sparks drifted downward.

Glover came back, his arms empty. The room was full of a bitter, strangling smoke. The mingled reek of burning cloth and scorching thatch filled the place. It was growing light inside the mission, from the flames eating through the roof. Glover's face was the face of a devil. He was seizing the second bundle, the smoking one, and thrusting it savagely against the last remaining one. That caught. He rushed out.

The crackling was loud. Horribly loud. A little roaring noise was audible now, too. And the windows glowed more brightly from the flames spreading on the outside of the thatch.

Glover's revolver went off thunderously. The girl heard him cursing savagely on the veranda. She coughed uncontrollably. Billups was stumbling toward her. She reached out her arms helplessly to him.

GLOVER came back. He kicked the last bundle of stuff down through hole in the floor. It was pouring out a dense, a strangling cloud of almost tangible whiteness. It was bright inside the mission now, but one could see nothing because of the smoke.

Glover seized her. The grip of his hands on her shoulders hurt. She shrank away, her lips parting.

A snarl of rage sounded deafeningly loud in her ears. She was lifted off her feet, struggling futilely.

"I'm not good enough to touch you, eh?" raged a voice close by her ear. "I'll show you!"

A great paw seized her face, turning it upward. Glover's face blotted out everything. She was being kissed. Repeatedly, deliberately, insultingly. Stark terror filled her as she felt herself being swung downward through the air. Terror widened eyes saw Billups cursing wildly and flinging himself, bound as he was, savagely upon Glover, trying to disable him by the sheer impact of his body.

She heard Glover growl furiously. Heard a momentary struggle. She was on her feet now, on the earth under the house where an incredible volume of smoke was pouring out of the bundles of cloth and stuff Glover had lighted and flung out. She stumbled and bumped against the posts supporting the house. Someone came hurtling down through the opening in the floor. Billups, fallen flat and unable to get up.

Glover came leaping down behind him. He jerked Billups to his feet. The girl reached out her hand desperately, and saw that he was untying Billups' hands.

"Downward in the smoke," he snarled

to her. "That'll cover us a little. Understand?"

She tried to gasp an assent, but choked upon the smoke. Glover thrust Billups against her.

"Downward!" he snapped. "Keep in the smoke! If you see anybody, shoot him! And if you try to kill me, I'll break your back with my hands!"

Here, under the mission, the smoke was a thick, colorless cloud which blotted out everything and let her see Billups and Glover only as misty silhouettes against the bright moonlight outside. But as the three of them ran strangling in the midst of the low lying cloud that poured from the smoldering bedding and clothes, it became impossible to see outlines. The smoke was a fleecy white cloud that burned the lungs, that blinded the eyes, that was a concealment and a torture and a godsend.

It hung close to the ground. The three separate smoke trails blended into a single long streamer of vapor that was shoulder high or better, and that was as thick as a wall. They ran across the little garden patches that they could not see beneath their feet. They ran desperately, coughing and strangling and running. The smoke was suddenly tinged with pinkish light. With an abrupt, hollow booming, the mission caught fire and flamed up in an impressive pillar of fire, with little sparks dancing madly in the rising currents of air. The moonlight went pale and wan by contrast. In momentary glimpses the girl could see the edge of the jungle; tall trees and wide flung branches, glowing redly in the glare.

More to the point, the smoke cloud through which the three of them struggled began to glow translucently. The girl, gasping for breath in the thick stuff which made every breath a torment, saw weird, exaggerated shadows of herself and Billups and Glover flung on ahead of them. Huge long shadows, making grotesque gestures in the strangling fog.

A yell arose. Toiling desperately after Glover and Billups, the girl realized that it came from more than one throat. She saw a tiny spark through the glowing reddish mist. The crack of the shot and the whine of the bullet followed instantly. Su Yang was off in the very edge of the jungle, nursing a scorched face, a bullet punctured arm, and a thirst for vengeance as the mission burned.

A shadow made extraordinary gesticulations in the smoke. A strange shadow, from behind. The girl saw Glover whirl and shoot at it. Then she stumbled and tall canes bumped and thrashed at her. She and the two white men were crashing their way through the patch of Indian corn, making a prodigious din that told but too plainly of their flight.

More yells came. Dried bamboo stalks in the burning building began to explode with brittle detonations as the heated air in the several joints burst open the partly burned stalks. The jungle loomed dark and terrible overhead, with crimson lights from the fire showing upon its dark leaves. Glover swung about and waited fiercely, his features contorted into a grimace of rage. The girl saw the now distant firelight glittering on the polished metal of his revolver as Billups dragged her past.

THE jungle . . . Something with thorns scratched her arms. There were slim, hard stalks of jungle things, and the rough, harsh bark of trees. Creepers lashed at her. Billups stumbled and recovered, plunging madly into the jungle and dragging the girl desperately behind him. She stumbled and fought to keep up, though he was nearly jerking her off her feet.

Foliage closed about them. From an intolerable brightness, there was a vast obscurity with bright spots of reddish light from the clearing. Glover was still back there. She could hear his gun going savagely. Then the crashing as he, too, dived into the jungle. He blundered among the thorny growth, calling for them in a voice like the roaring of a bull.

The girl felt herself answering, "Here!" the instant before Billups' hand closed over her mouth, and the instant before he had desperately whispered, "Hush!"

The thrashing that was Glover turned and came toward them. Shouts came from the clearing. Glover was growling without any attempt at concealment for the moment. Then the girl heard him grunt suddenly, and a strangled other noise. He dived down and thrashed about on the ground. He had stepped on something that squealed. He got to his feet again and came on, rumbling triumphantly.

A moment's pause in a semiclear space where pale moonlight shone down and but the most occasional of red speckles from the burning mission still penetrated. Glover came wading out of the jungle, bearing a burden. He set it upright, shaking it savagely as he did so.

"Here's a Sakai," he rumbled. "I stepped on him. You can talk his talk. Those yellow devils will be trying to trail us in a minute. Tell him to lead us away or I'll gut him."

The girl caught her breath. A little, naked, filthy Sakai shivered and moaned in Glover's grasp. A little, wizened man with a breechclout of ragged bark cloth tied about his middle. Wrinkled and white with some scabrous skin disease, with wood ashes in his air and smeared on his body, and shivering in abject and pitiful terror.

"Pa A'Gap!" cried the girl desperately. She fumbled for the uncouth syllables of *Sĕnoi*, Sakai talk, that would convey her meaning.

Shivering and moaning, and exactly like some wild thing that has been trapped and is helpless, the little Sakai heard her. He chattered a frightened agreement. Glover loosened his belt and snapped it about the savage's throat.

"Tell him if he tries to bolt I'll knife him," he snarled again as the Sakai made to move off. "You hold onto me. Duck when you see me duck. Let Billups follow you."

They moved off. It was desperately slow and it was horribly noisy, their travel through the jungle. They heard crashings behind them as Su Yang's followers dived into the undergrowth. The Chinese were enjoying this. Professional fighting men all, an affair of two men to kill and a woman to seize, with money as a reward for their effort, was calculated to make them as happy as a Kang-Tze river pirate ever hopes to be.

They tried to be silent when they were once in the jungle. But that was difficult indeed. And then they heard the noise that the hand-locked group of fugitives were making as they followed the scared little savage toward a game trail. The fugitives were moving faster than their pursuers, because their filthy little guide had eyes like a cat and terror to drive him on. But the Chinese came after them as swiftly as they could force a way through the undergrowth. Still, as the jungle grew denser, that was not very fast.

VIII

THE fugitives reached the Sakai encampment just about at dawn, and it was not an especially inspiring sight. There were a dozen or so shelters, of the most temporary possible sort. Dried leaves clinging to the wattled walls. Reeking, acrid smoke hovering about from the fires in every hut. Fire, of course, is the one great luxury the little jungle folk have, and they curl themselves about the logs whose smoldering edges are pushed together in the middle of every hut, and they slumber happily in the partly cooled ashes. The jungle loomed all about the encampment, the taller trees rising above a blanket of foggy mist that filled the clearing.

When the three fugitives and Pa A'Gap came wearily out of the jungle path into the village there were three or four of the miserable little creatures shivering as they gazed out of the doors of the huts. Inside, there were others squatting by the fires, scratching themselves and exchanging querulous monosyllables. At sunrise the vitality of the Sakai is at its lowest ebb and all his faculties are at their least alert. Normally, they would have caught the *clomp-clomp* of boots on the trail a half mile off, and by this time each and every individual in the encampment would have melted into the jungle. Now, there was a shivering, startled stare, a hiccoughing grunt of alarm, and naked figures dashed wildly for cover.

Pa A'Gap called them back, his own voice quivering with terror. Glover's gun was in the middle of his spine, but the girl had reassured him in advance.

Half the village hesitated and paused in its flight. The other half dived into the jungle and vanished; only to be promptly soaked all over again by the condensed mist and dew of the foliage, and to have the wetness start them to itching like mad.

Those who halted in their flight remained poised in an attitude of alertness singularly like that of a wild animal. Little men, astoundingly gnarly and unattractive to look at, and almost incredibly naked. A breechclout of bark cloth is the tribal garment; but it is generally in the last stage of dilapidation and of much more service as a place to tuck in a wood knife and other odds and ends than as an aid to modesty. Of that quality, anyhow, the Sakai have none.

"These *gobs,*" explained Pa A'Gap in a trembling voice, "are friends."

The headman of the encampment inspected them timorously. He observed a trickle of tobacco juice on Pa A'Gap's chin. The headman further observed that Pa A'Gap was unharmed. Glover had taken off the belt five minutes before, at the girl's suggestion.

"What do they want?" asked the headman anxiously.

The girl interposed, fumbling for the clumsy monosyllables of *Sênoi.* The headman recognized her. She was the daughter of that *gob,* that alien, that non-Sakai, who had paid the Sakai rock salt and trade tobacco for listening to him speaking strange things in a loud voice. That *gob,* also, had raised marvelous quantities of food which he shared with the Sakai.

The favorable impression of the headman became strengthened. He scratched a hairy, scaly leg meditatively against its hairy, scaly fellow. He was moved by no sensation of gratitude, of course. People whose bellies are forever empty—and no Sakai has had a full stomach for generations—do not cultivate the gentler emotions. But the headman's mouth watered, it literally drooled at the thought of trade tobacco.

Glover, scowling, flung a handful as one might fling a bone to a dog. The tension eased. Little, naked, verminous men drifted inch by inch back into the encampment.

Glover went into the hut nearest him. He came out with a cooking pot full of some unappetizing mess. He looked at the girl and she shook her head. He fell to eating it between yawns. He had had no sleep to speak of for two nights, now.

A LONG discussion full of lengthy pauses was taking place between the girl and Billups, on one hand, and the headman and a group of his more venerable subjects. Glover especially noted one ancient Sakai. His face was tatooed in blue and was full of an intricate network of tiny wrinkles. He was watching as the headman filled a bamboo pipe and lighted it. This other Sakai was old and skinny, and the ashes of many months of luxurious sleeping in the beds of dead fires were worked thoroughly into the creases of his skin and into his hair. But he watched, dribbling, as the headman puffed the reeking pipe.

Glover contemptuously tossed him tobacco and scowled when the wizened little man beamed in the ultimate of bliss. He looked extraordinarily monkeylike when he grinned.

The discussion took an unhappy turn. The wrinkled little headman got out querulous, frightened monosyllables. The girl reassured him tiredly. He clacked an order over his shoulder, and the encampment was instantly in a fever of activity. The women were packing up their possessions—mostly babies and cooking pots—and the men were hastily gathering together their weapons and the supply of food at hand. The last was little enough, in all conscience.

The encampment began to be evacuated in haste. Glover rumbled angrily. He stood up, dropping his bowl of food.

"What in hell!" he said furiously. "You're letting the little vermin get away?"

"Of course," said Billups sharply. "Those Chinks will be tracking us, and they can do it well enough on account of our boots. They'd kill some of the little savages just for fun."

"I'll catch a few women," growled Glover.

Billups' expression became contemptuous and stern.

"Touch one and I'll drill you!" he snarled. "I've stood about all I'm going to stand from you, anyhow!"

Glover stared in utter, blank unbelief of his own ears. Billups had stood all he was going to stand from him! When Glover had saved his life in the first place, and had had to tie his hands to keep him from ruining everything, and . . .

"Why, you damned fool!" said Glover, in a surging tide of anger. "I——"

"You'll leave the Sakai women alone!" snapped Billups in a desperate savagery, coupled with conscious virtue and a splendid heroic wrath. "It's your kind of scum who spoils the East for white men!"

Glover snarled.

"My kind of scum!" he raged. Then once more he fought down his wrath. "I'm going to take the lousy wenches for hostages," he roared. "Tell the Sakai that they're to take their blowguns and pot the Chinks from the jungle, one by one, as they're trailing us. Tell 'em we'll cut the women's throats if they don't."

That idea, if not notably pure ethics, was assuredly sound strategy. It was the one single threat which would send the little jungle folk desperately to their separate ambushes with their deadly little blowguns ready. Timid past belief, the Sakai have yet their own private affections. On that threat they would have sent the deadly small darts flicking silently into the trailing party Su Yang led. They would have wiped out all danger to the three fugitives. And then, on receiving their women back, they would have fled in the uttermost of panic to the remotest and most isolated spot in all the jungle which covers Malaysia like a blanket. Because the blowgun darts could not be used against Glover and Billups. It takes some time for a man to die of *ipoh* poisoning, and with hostages in line, Glover could have killed every one of them after being struck and before he died. Which he would have done. Which the Sakai would have known. Which would have made them assail the Chinese by preference.

It was sound strategy, but it was not pure ethics. So Billups said sternly,

"Touch one of them and I'll kill you! If I've got to be killed, at least I can die as a gentleman."

Billups, you see, felt safe. He was many miles from the spot where he had last seen the Chinese. And he had a guide to take him farther. And there was a girl listening, a girl in whose eyes—both for economic and biological reasons—he wished to shine.

He glanced at her now, and she was gazing admiringly at him. So he said grimly:

"That's about of a piece with the rest of your planning, Glover. You've got a beastly sort of a mind, and a beastly way of acting. I don't trust you, and I've got Alice to look after. I'm not going to take any more risks. We separate here."

Glover stared. His shoulders were stooping a little. His face was becoming deadly, menacing.

"I haven't forgotten," said Billups harshly—Billups, by the way, had his revolver entirely ready in his hand. "I haven't forgotten one thing you did. You kissed Alice. I'd kill you for that now, but Alice has asked me to spare you. But I won't risk having you about any more. Not that I'm afraid of you! I'm *not* afraid of you! But I've no fancy for being killed in my sleep, and leaving Alice at your mercy. There's not much doubt of how a man of your stamp would act. So we separate. Here. Now. You go your way and we go ours. You've got as much chance as we have to get clear. I'm letting you off this easily because we're all three possibly near to death."

This was distinctly a reasonable and on the whole a rather generous speech. If there was a certain irony in not trusting Glover with the girl alone, when it was Glover's acceptance of a deadly risk for her protection that had started all the fighting, Billups was innocent of ironic intent. He was acting in the best tradition of the merchant marine and English fair play, and various other estimable codes.

"You'll do that, eh?" raged Glover. "*You?* Why, you bloody damned fool, I've kept her safe so far in spite of you! And before I'll trust her to a swine, a lousy coward. . . . "

With a roar, he charged. His plunge was sudden. Billups fired shakenly and the bullet went wild. The little Sakai melted instantly into the jungle and from its edge watched, shaking, the extraordinarily short mêlée that followed.

IT WAS short. The smoke of Billups' shot almost scorched Glover's face. Billups leaped back for room to aim another bullet, and the girl flung herself desperately in Glover's path, her face chalky at the murder she saw in his expression, clinging to his arms, trying desperately to wind herself about him, struggling frantically to keep him from killing Billups.

And Glover worked brutally to break her hold. Brutally, that is, to all seeming. Billups, afterward, carefully never pointed out that Glover could have broken her most frenzied grip with a single blow of his fist. But for perhaps ten, perhaps fifteen seconds she succeeded in holding him, snarling and roaring profanely, away from Billups. In that time Billups had raised his revolver for a second shot, had found he could not be sure of hitting Glover and missing the girl, and darted swiftly behind Glover.

There, with science and skill, he brought down the barrel of his revolver with terrific force upon Glover's head. And Glover bellowed and staggered, and abruptly collapsed.

He remained unconscious for possibly five minutes, in which time things moved swiftly. When he opened his eyes again to snarl, he was tied hand and foot with rattan cordage, the evacuation of the village was complete and Billups was regarding him with a truly splendid calm.

"I'm glad you've come to," said Billups severely. "I've left you tied up, of course, but you ought to be able to get yourself loose in half an hour or so. I'm leaving your revolver with you. When you get clear, you'll have exactly an even chance with me."

Glover spat an epithet at him that would have stung the hide of a rhinoceros. Billups bit his lip.

"You can say what you please, of course," he said coldly. "You're helpless, and I shan't harm you. I know pretty well everything about you now. You came up to kidnap Alice——"

"You damned lousy swine——!" snarled Glover, beginning to draw upon all his knowledge of expletive to try and make Billups mad enough to turn him loose to fight.

"You must have heard of her inheritance," said Billups grimly. "You came up with those men, and on finding Alice's father dead you realized that you were able to kidnap her alone. And you tried to chuck your partners out. It may be, too—" Billups flushed with anger—"that you fancied you could force her to marry you. I've settled all that. You're lucky I'm letting you off like this. Now listen to me! Maybe I won't get out of this alive, and maybe you won't either, but if I ever run across you again, anywhere, at any time, I'm going to settle with you in full! I'm letting you off now. But next time we meet, God help you!"

He strode grandly out of Glover's line of sight. Glover caught one glimpse of the girl moving to join him, and he saw her regarding him doubtfully, and unhappily. But, among other biological laws that make human relationships more complicated than they should be, there is a law which enables a girl, for a certain short time, to believe absolutely anything she is told by the man whom another biological law makes her love.

The girl went down the trail after Billups and the two filthy little Sakai men who had been bribed by lavish promises to guide them to a Malay village. It is probable that she did not altogether credit Glover with all the criminal intentions Billups assigned him, and it may be that for a fleeting moment or so she was dubious about the heroism of Billups in knocking Glover unconscious from behind. But various laws would take care of that —in time.

Glover, though, had no source of illusions. He cursed himself hoarse while he writhed in his bonds. He knew that Su Yang's companions would be on the trail with the earliest patch of dawn light. He knew that a clear trail, impossible to miss, led straight to this spot. And when a man like Su Yang comes upon a man he hates, say, like Glover, and the hated man is bound hand and foot and helpless, it is a biological law that the bound man is going to be uncomfortable. Su Yang would take just as much time to kill Glover as he felt he could spare from the further pursuit of Billups and the girl. Say, half an hour. But a man who spends even half an hour dying of fire, or having his bones broken, one by one, or being slowly and delicately sliced to shreds. . . .

GLOVER worked desperately to free himself. The bonds were tight. Horribly tight. Tied by a seaman; a veritable officer of the merchant marine, no less. And ten minutes went by. Fifteen minutes. The knots were tighter than at the beginning. Glover cursed horribly. He knew ropes and roping as well as the next man. These knots would not come loose.

Billups, in all probability, had assured himself that he wished Glover to escape. But Billups had not wished Glover to escape too promptly, or he would follow and try to kill somebody. So Billups had had to make a very fine balance between knots which it would be difficult to escape from, and knots which it would be impossible to escape from. And, undoubtedly, he had slightly overestimated Glover's powers of escape. Let us call it that. It is almost certainly the truth. So—let us call it that.

In any event Glover knew that he was left helpless for Su Yang to find.

The jungle loomed above him silent and aloof. Little things slithered and crawled about on the fallen jungle leaves. Lithe things clambered and swung in the branches.

It seemed to Glover that he heard a single sound. A syllable, it might be, of the tonal Suchin Chinese his erstwhile followers used. That one syllable was muted and separated from all its fellows. It was very faint, but it told him much.

Suddenly, with an incredible expenditure of energy, Glover hunched his shoulders. With a horrible effort, he moved his body perhaps an inch and a half along the ground. Grunting, he tried it again. And again. He panted; he gasped. When he caught his breath, he cursed. But he moved, with a terrible and exhausting slowness, toward one of the strictly temporary shelters of the Sakai encampment.

He heard no more sounds which might have been Su Yang's party. Not any indications whatever. Which said nothing. They were trailing. They would not wish to make much noise.

His head smote on a floor log. His hair burrowed among ashes; in dirt that was undoubtedly full of the vermin the little Sakai tolerate as brothers in degradation. Acrid, strangling wood smoke choked him.

When at last the smoldering coals scorched his wrists, he was panting in great gasps, in sobbing breaths, from the struggle to cover possibly thirty feet of ground. And then he shut his teeth to keep back groans. Because rattan cordage is strong; and it is flexible, especially when green; and it is very convenient indeed. But it burns slowly, infinitely so.

But of course Glover broke clear. Of course. He snapped the scorched bands of rattan, and portions of the seared flesh of his wrists broke off with the bonds. And he tore away the lines about his legs, and he picked up his revolver and crammed the extra shells into his pockets. And he snarled.

Billups was on ahead. He could follow him. And Su Yang was behind. He could waylay him. Or he could simply step aside, simply step magnificently aside, and let Su Yang and his fellow ex-river pirates follow down the clear trail Billups was leaving, until they reached and killed Billups.

Billups would leave him for Su Yang to find? He would!

Glover snarled rather horribly, cursing shrilly to himself in the midst of the vast, incurious jungle trees.

"By God!" he raged. "He called me *scum!* Me! *Me!* And I'm a gentleman, by God! I'm a gentleman! And I'll prove it!"

He looked at his revolver. The chambers of the cylinder were full. Snarling unutterable, unprintable, unthinkable things, he plunged into the jungle path. He looked to be in the mood to kill.

He was.

IX

THAT ends the story, of course. Nobody knows what happened in the jungle path. Abject little Sakai who were scuttling through the jungle, with all their earthly possessions on their backs, heard shooting, some ten minutes later. It lasted a long time. It was heavy at first. Then it became lighter. Then it grew lighter still, and the sound of occasional shots moved swiftly as if someone was fleeing and someone else was pursuing. And then it stopped.

But nobody knows the details of that shooting. Glover never told. The Sakai, to a man, deny fearfully that they know anything about it. And Billups knows nothing about it. And the girl, of course, knows nothing. Even Gow Lee, much as he hates Glover these days, does not know exactly what happened to Su Yang and a small body of very useful ex-river pirates who went upcountry to Khilit and never came back again.

And Billups, of course, married the girl. They are very happy, one understands, and sometimes Billups can be persuaded to tell the story of how he won his bride. There are certain omissions in his tale, which his hearers understand perfectly to be due to dislike of self-praise. They generally shudder at the description of Glover. Glover seems to be a person utterly without redeeming qualities. And it is rumored that at first Mrs. Billups looked slightly uncomfortable when Glover was described by her husband.

But latterly she listens quite untroubled. She confirms by silence at any rate, the singularly vicious characterization Billups gives him. Which is as well.

His story, though, never describes the conversation around the campfire the night after they left Glover tied up. The girl was very silent, gazing into the fire. Disturbed. Unhappy. Distrait. Billups stared at her. He thought he saw tears. And a sudden uncomfortable suspicion, an ugly thought, came into Billups' head. Nothing else could account for her unhappiness now, safe, and going down to the coast to be married to him.

"I say, Alice," he said suddenly, his voice harsh in spite of himself. "That chap Glover——"

She looked up silently.

"Was he ever— Dammit! Was he—" He swallowed, and blurted out the question. "Was he ever—impertinent?"

She gazed into the fire. Perhaps she thought of his having kissed her. Twice. Savagely. Desperately. Defiantly.

"I—don't think he ever—meant to be impertinent," she said slowly.

Billups frowned over the answer. He opened his mouth to press the point. But he changed his mind and said importantly:

"I wanted to know. A man of that class . . ." And so he dismissed the matter for all time. Quite definitely.

And Billups never mentions that conversation.

BUT Glover . . . Well, Glover got down to Singapore a couple of months later, rather fagged out and with some half healed bullet wounds and signs of fever on him. Broke to the world, of course and utterly friendless. Nobody had any use for him, and he gradually reached approximately the status of a beachcomber. Cadging drinks here and there . . . And when Glover sank to cadging drinks in Singapore, of course he was finished. In Singapore, you understand, a man may be not only down and out, but through. Glover was through when even Gow Lee would not stake him any longer; and after the affair up Khilit way, Gow Lee spread out his hands indifferently. If for a moment his eyes raged, his face did not change, nor did his speech. He simply would never again use Captain Glover for any of the gun runnings, smugglings or assorted illicit enterprises he might have on hand. And since Gow Lee was the last man who had any use for Glover, when Gow Lee deserted him he was finished.

For a sample, well . . . One night he was cadging drinks in Ryan's place in Singapore—where surely men are not particular—and somebody brought the second mate of the *Camden Town* over to him.

"Are you the man they call Captain Bill Glover?" asked the second mate coldly. The second mate had had only a couple of drinks, and he looked spruce and trim and very fresh cheeked and wholesome—even in Ryan's place in Singapore. "Are you the man they call Captain Bill Glover?" he demanded again. "Were you up Khilit way a few months ago?"

Glover looked up scowling from where he sat by a glass that somebody else had paid for. Never humble, Glover, even when he was cadging drinks. He'd frown and scowl when he asked for them. But somehow people gave them to him.

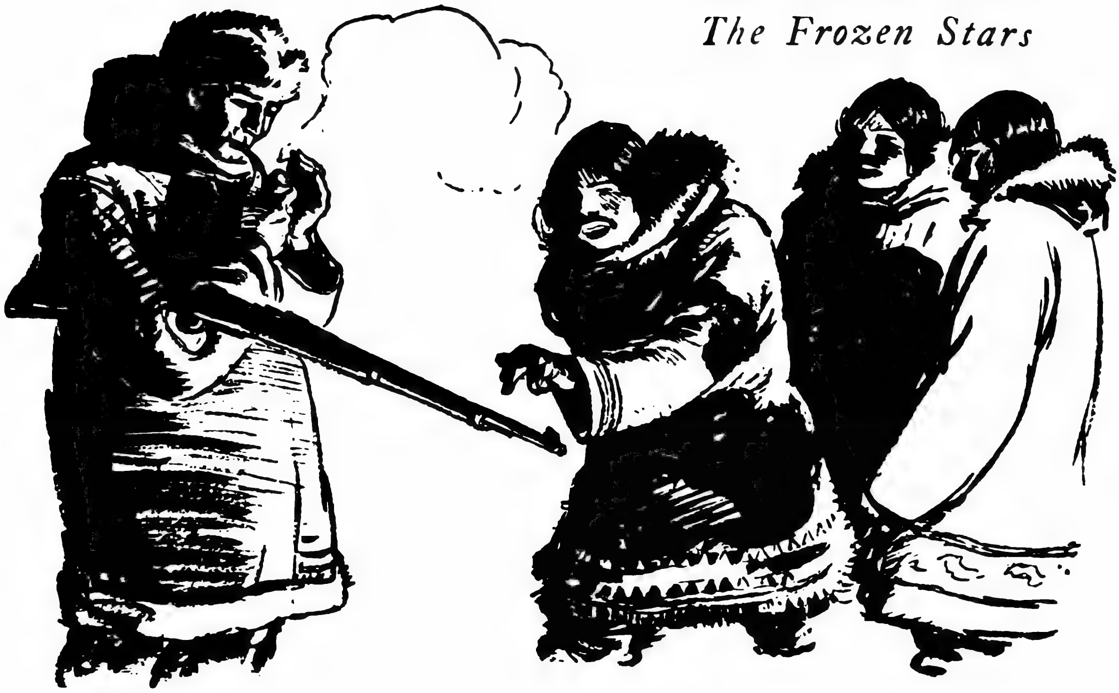
"Yes," he snapped. "What of it?"

"You lousy, rotten bum!" said the second mate of the *Camden Town,* doubling his fists and swinging with an unholy joy at Glover's face. "Billups was on my ship, and I've been hoping to meet you just to bash your damned face in!"

The fist grazed Glover's skull. He'd dodged from pure instinct. Then he stood up and on the instant was cold sober. And he beat the second mate of the *Camden Town* until two men had to carry him down to the boat landing, to be put on board. And then he sat down again with people looking at him queerly, and finished his drink, and presently was cadging them again. . . .

This story, you see, should never be printed, because it proves that right and justice and praiseworthy young men do not always triumph in this world. Or maybe it proves something else. But, in any event, it should not be printed, because its moral is depressing. Consider: Its moral is that virtue is its own reward.

A Stark Drama That
Was Enacted Under
The Frozen Stars



SEVENTY BELOW

By NORMAN REILLY RAINE

THIS is a tale of the winter of storms, when gale after gale screamed down from the ice cap of the pole through the months-long night, and the rime dimmed stars, and the northern lights, lit the Arctic heavens with wan fires, and flamed sardonically over the tiny Eskimo settlement on Desolation Gulf. But the story had its beginning two years before, when Ulukshak, the headman, traded his oldest wife, Napniakuk, and her six year old boy, to Ika-Yena, the Fox, of Misery Bay, for a .32 caliber rifle with a missing backsight.

That was the year, too, when the Mounted Police shack on Lost Lake caught fire, with the temperature at forty-five below, and Skagway Davidson was burned to death, and Constable Silent McKenzie was sent up from Fort Starnes to replace him, thus giving McKenzie an opportunity to make a few more characteristic entries in his diary.

It was seven hundred odd miles from the police detachment at Fort Starnes to the advanced police post on Lost Lake; and on the evening of his fifty-first day on the trail, Constable McKenzie had the misfortune to slip through a treacherous snow crown into icy water up to his waist. The temperature was forty-nine below, and he had but one more day's travel to his destination, so he did not make camp that night. He continued doggedly on, pushing himself and his remaining dogs in an endeavor which he would not admit to himself to be desperate. So Arbuthnot, the wizened, amiable little Hudson's Bay Company factor at Lost Lake, had not far to drag him, when by lucky chance he ran across him, an hour or so after he had pegged out.

Arbuthnot, who was lonely and garrulous, and not by nature a recluse, made him extremely comfortable and fed him some hot soup, which McKenzie's stomach instantly rejected. The dogs were not so fastidious, and the way they tore at the fish that were thrown them told the factor a thing or two. The constable, however, was not communicative about his undoubted sufferings on the trail in. Arbuthnot was a romantic of sorts, in his kindly way, and when he learned that the newcomer was Silent McKenzie, he redoubled his cordiality, for McKenzie was thought well of in the force. In the Royal Canadian Mounted Police this is a distinction not lightly to be earned.

He did not look particularly heroic, this tall, loose framed man with the high cheek bones, and keen, puckered blue eyes set in a face burned to leather by glare ice, and flecked raw with frost. His clothes were ragged and dirty after weeks of travel, and a sprouting beard obscured what might have been more favorable portions of his features. The journey had hammered him some. He was emaciated to an almost shocking degree, and there was the unpleasantness of his half frozen feet. Still, you can't tell what is under the hide of a man, and in one characteristic he certainly lived up to his name. He was more uncommunicative than any man Arbuthnot had met; and silence is a quality not always desirable in the North, where the only diversions are cards, and a certain amount of sociable chat.

While McKenzie recovered some of his strength in sleep, the factor recollected what he had heard about him. Among others, there was the story of the time when he spent three years in a search among the Arctic wastes north of Ellesmere Land, for an Indian murderer. And although he had learned of a probability amounting practically to certainty, five months after he started, that his man had been drowned in a seal hunt, he spent the remaining thirty-one months, amid incredible dangers and hardships, definitely establishing the fact. And when he had returned to civilization the most colorful entry in his diary was:

It will be good to taste ice cream again.

ARBUTHNOT glanced at the sleeping figure—he had insisted upon shaving before turning in—and noted more closely the thin, determined lips, and long, formidable angle of his jaw. A hard, literal man, he decided, with not a spark of imagination in him; unbeatable as a hunter of men, but uninfluenced by anything but cold facts.

McKenzie awoke from sleep and ate a little. After he had finished, Arbuthnot, who was hungry for gossip, plied him with questions. At least, he commenced. He asked:

"Anything new down at the Fort?"

McKenzie weighed the question, lips pursed, eyes on the ceiling.

"N-no—I guess not."

He filled his pipe and lighted it, puffing large, with the satisfaction of a man to whom tobacco long has been denied. Then he pulled a leather bound diary from his tunic pocket. The factor watched him curiously, for McKenzie's diary entries were famous, although he showed them to no one, and did not refer to them except when writing official reports or giving evidence. He never could understand the astonishment and occasional amusement their terse sentences often evoked.

After an hour Arbuthnot tried again.

"Ye must have had one hell of a trip, coming in," he said.

McKenzie nodded, and opened the diary.

"What was the date, the day before yesterday?" he asked.

"The twenty-seventh."

"Thanks."

The factor persevered.

"How many dogs did ye have, when ye left Fort Starnes?"

"Seven."

"Losh, man! What happened to the rest?"

Silent McKenzie wrote carefully in his diary, and put it away before he replied.

"I lost most of my grub through a hole in the Bitter River ice, six weeks ago tomorrow."

What he had written was:

Forty-three below. Tuesday, Feb. 27. Fair in A. M. Strong N. E. wind increasing to half gale with snow. Severe cramps tonight. Probably from eating dog's liver.

He jerked up his head and listened.

"There's somebody coming."

There was a distant, frenzied clamor of dogs, in which McKenzie's and the factor's joined. Runners creaked in the dry snow, and presently the door was opened and an Eskimo entered, bundled in sealskin, and fresh from a long trail, his fur *artigee* rimed with frost. His name was Komeuk, a native of the settlement on Desolation Gulf at the mouth of the Strange People River, three hundred miles to the north, and he had a tale to tell. It was the tale of Ulukshak, the headman, and Ika-Yena, the Fox, and a missing backsight.

Ulukshak had not discovered that the backsight was missing until he returned to his own igloo on Desolation Gulf, and undid the wrapping of caribou hide that protected the breech. Ika-Yena, the Fox, had tricked him. He had purposely removed the backsight, trusting that it would not be noticed until Ulukshak got home, three days' journey away. Three days to go; three days to return to Misery Bay. That would give Ika-Yena, the Fox, plenty of time to observe the disposition of the woman Napniakuk, for whom he had traded the rifle. If she was tractable and kind, well and good; Ulukshak should have apologies and the backsight. If not, the headman could take the woman and boy home; and Ika-Yena would be saved the trouble of the journey. But Napniakuk was a scold, Ulukshak reflected, and he had rejoiced at being rid of her. Now, in addition to having to take her into his house again, Ika-Yena would demand the rifle back.

He was like a bull walrus in rutting time, for strength and ferocity, this Ulukshak. And when he realized the duplicity of Ika-Yena, the Fox, who was not a true Eskimo, but an Indian from the fringe of the Barren Lands, his little shoe button eyes glittered with rage. Quickly he stuffed a few cartridges in his pocket, hitched up his dogs, and set out on the back trail for Ika-Yena's *tupek* on Misery Bay.

The sky was heavy with snow, and rapidly it grew colder. With the snow came a rising wind, and six hours later Ulukshak and his dogs were lying blizzard bound in the lee of an ice hummock, with the temperature at fifty-nine below, and the wind wolves hunting full throat through the wild Arctic night. For two days Ulukshak lay, while the whirling snow piled in huge drifts across the trail, and one of his best dogs perished of cold.

At noon of the sixth day he reached Misery Bay. And when he saw the *tupek* of Ika-Yena, the Fox, with its comfortable spiral of smoke rising against the banked up snow, his temper, never of the sweetest, burned white hot. But as he urged his dogs down the slope, his broad, flat face in its halo of steam and fur expressed nothing at all.

Ika-Yena, the Fox, was within the *tupek* playing cards with Komeuk, an Eskimo from Ulukshak's own village on Desolation Gulf. Ulukshak stood patiently in the background and waited for them to finish their game. Ika-Yena played as though he was not present. When the game was done Ulukshak produced the rifle and demanded the missing backsight. Ika-Yena's shrewd little eyes screwed up.

"A rifle is no good to you without a backsight, eh? Well, a woman without laughter is no good to me. Give me the rifle and take your woman and boy. I do not want them."

"I do not want them either," said Ulukshak stubbornly. "I want only the backsight."

"There is no backsight! Give me the rifle and be off!"

Ulukshak did not answer. He went outside the *tupek* and hung around in front, playing with some cartridges. Then he went in again. Presently Komeuk left the *tupek* and the two principals remained, eyeing each other. Ika-Yena, the Fox, moved suddenly toward his own rifle, and Ulukshak shot him dead.

When Komeuk had finished speaking, Silent McKenzie again hauled out his notebook, and entered under current date:

> *Native Komeuk reported murder, by Ulukshak of Desolation Gulf. Will investigate.*

Then he again tucked it away, and, relighting his pipe began to drag his gear together. He stopped, to eye Komeuk sharply.

"Why did you come to tell me this?"

"Ulukshak knew that I saw him kill Ika-Yena, the Fox, who was my friend. He would have shot me, too, so that I could not tell. But I ran. And now I am afraid to go home."

Arbuthnot stared in amazement, as he saw McKenzie preparing to depart.

"Where are ye going, man? Surely to God, you're not starting up there today, after what ye've just been through?"

McKenzie looked up from his gear.

"Why not?" he asked.

In the trial of Ulukshak for the murder of Ika-Yena, the Fox, the chief witness for the Crown was Komeuk. He was supported by Constable McKenzie, who testified to having exhumed the body. Extenuating circumstances considered, Ulukshak got two years imprisonment. As he was being led from the courtroom to begin his sentence, he stopped and eyed Komeuk, and shuffled a ponderous step or two toward him. Then he was pulled away, but Komeuk knew what his eyes had promised.

THE second winter came to Desolation Gulf—the winter of the Great Frost—and slowly the long night closed down. Ice locked the rivers and inlets and bays, and spread out past the bold headland of Cape Deception well into open water. The brief Christmas festivities at the Moravian mission, one hundred and eighty miles east, were over, and the natives returned, laden with tinsel gifts and colored candles for the children to chew, to their igloos at the mouth of the Strange People River. The gales came, seemingly without end. Then they ceased, and it grew cold; cold without wind; an implacable, marrow freezing cold that settled down and dug in, driving the caribou and musk oxen and white Arctic owls to more hospitable feeding grounds. The piles of dry fish rapidly diminished. The caribou meat disappeared. Seals were scarce and the tidewater seal holes became frozen tight in a temperature that dropped to sixty-five degrees below. Hunger, the dreaded white ghost of the north, stalked bony legged across the land.

When Ulukshak, the headman, returned to Desolation Gulf from prison, no event was made of it. He arrived shortly before the terrible cold; it was as though he had brought it with him. And on the trail in he encountered Komeuk, who was out on a fruitless hunt for bear. No word was spoken, but the two eyed each other like hostile dogs, stepping warily around one another on the narrow trail. Ulukshak did not look back; but Komeuk struggled up the side of a slippery ice mound, and watched the other until he and his team were distant black dots against the snow, winding tortuously between the hummocks toward the village. Komeuk did not know what to expect, but the meeting had spoiled his appetite for the hunt. He gave it up, and returned in a roundabout way to his igloo to await developments.

For a time there were none.

Daily the cold increased. A native or two went to the south, past Lost Lake, and two or three families left the settlement and made their way across the sea ice to distant Sinkatunk Island, where it was reported that a whaler was wintering. Komeuk would have liked to accompany them, but pride now forbade that he should run away before Ulukshak. Besides, the headman, while surly and loud mouthed in condemnation of the police and the tyranny of the white man's law, was not actively unfriendly to him.

Ulukshak had resumed his place as headman, and secretly his people were glad, for although he was by nature brutal and domineering he was a fisherman and hunter of note. But all of his skill went for nothing during the great frost, and as the winter deepened and starvation tightened its bands, his influence seemed on the wane. He grew morose and vindictive and became addicted to long spells of brooding.

Nearly three hundred miles south, Silent McKenzie was camped in the shelter of a patch of scrub pine beside an overhanging rock. He finished his meal, and built up his fire, and with a can of strong tea beside him and his pipe going, he made an entry in his diary by the red glow of the flames.

66 below. Mar. 2. Fifteen miles. Fairly clear and no wind. Left Lost Lake post on north patrol 7.20 A. M. Sled upset in afternoon crossing small ravine. One hour delay. Lost 2 lb tea from grubload for Desolation Gulf settlement. Arbuthnot said last night I lacked imagination. Why?

On the western edge of the settlement at Desolation Gulf was a large frame house, used in summer by sealers and fur traders who then made their headquarters at the mouth of the Strange People River. And as the food supply dwindled, and fuel became scarce, Ulukshak gave orders that all the families should gather there and use it as a common house, after first banking it thickly with snow blocks. This was done. There were then, besides himself and his two women: Komeuk; Kowkoteah, with whom he had been on bad terms for years; Neageuk, the halfwit; Kedlappik; Mukeing, the *angakok* or medicine man; and ancient shriveled Kidluk; together with their wives and children and dogs. The long period of want kept them more and more indoors, too apathetic to fight longer against fate, eking out the scanty rations through the desolate weeks with a few fish, that they managed from time to time to spear.

All the soapstone lamps but one had long since been extinguished, for seal fat was too precious to burn; so with one tiny flickering tongue of yellow light to lengthen their shadows, they sat through the long hours, passing the time by the telling of stories, queer mixtures of Christian Biblical lore and native legend. Into this dark atmosphere superstition crept, and fear, and a secret distrustful weighing of one another, and acrimonious disputes took place over the division of food. It became noticeable, too, that when Ulukshak took up the burden of a story, he mingled with its elements vague accusations for the ill luck that had befallen them, which played about each in turn. Each, that is, except Komeuk.

Daily the thermometer dropped, until it surpassed anything in the memory of the oldest dweller in the North. Constable McKenzie, struggling painfully across twenty miles of rough country to cut off a great bend of the river, made crawling progress in the teeth of a twenty mile wind. The extreme cold made breathing difficult and painful, and caused an acute burning and stifling in his lungs, particularly when the difficulties of the trail occasioned more than ordinary exertion. His face froze, despite all his experience and precaution, and he had constantly to halt and thaw it with bared hands. As obstacles increased, the lines of his mouth grew a shade more stubborn. His head went down and into the wind, and his eyes narrowed to ice beaded slits. He carried on a never ending battle with his dogs, who wanted to curl up and sleep, and when he made camp it took him an hour to thaw out his frozen chin, and cheek bones. His skin peeled and broke out, and as he made his meticulous diary entry his fingers stiffened as he wrote.

69 below. Mar. 17. 12 miles. Wind N. E. Dogs bleeding from mouth. Lost two from burst lungs.

He hesitated for a space, eyes turned upward in thought. Then a grim ghost of a smile played about his cracked lips as he added:

St. Patrick's Day. No shamrocks in sight.

Constable Silent McKenzie had made a joke.

ONE night, Ulukshak, who was droning an interminable story, broke off, and crossing abruptly to his woman, Napniakuk, gave her a cruel beating.

"It was you, slut, who helped to bring these misfortunes upon us! Let me tell you that you are one mouth too many!"

He glared about him, then returned to his place and assailed Mukeing, the *angakok*.

"Why are you silent? Does your witchcraft not tell you how to reward this woman, who snared her husband in the law of the white man? Does it not say that she is a fit bride for the Old-Man-who-Rides-the-Wind, hey?"

Neageuk, the halfwit, chuckled approval, as he did of every remark by whomever spoken. Ulukshak turned to him, and pointing to Napniakuk, shouted:

"There is work for you."

Napniakuk whimpered; but Neageuk shambled over, and grasping her by the wrist dragged her outside the house.

Within, the group sat as though numbed, but Ulukshak sat in the center with his lids closed, swaying gently to and fro. Presently Komeuk, who was frozen with terror, looked up. Ulukshak's eyes had opened and were fixed upon him.

Presently Neageuk, the halfwit, returned and wiped his hands on an old bird wing. The feathers were stained red.

"Well?" asked Ulukshak.

"Napniakuk is now a bride, Ulukshak," Neageuk replied.

Ulukshak rose up in fury.

"Ulukshak! Ulukshak! Are you afflicted with snow blindness, you ox, that you cannot see I am no longer Ulukshak? I am Nakongmek!"

The blasphemy drew a hissing intake of fear and awe. The others shrank from the headman; only ancient, wrinkled Kidluk, with his rheumy eyes, ventured to oppose him, mumbling through toothless gums.

"There is but one Nakongmek. So we were taught by the Christian fathers."

Ulukshak spat, with uncontrollable anger.

"Oh, yes—the Christian fathers! Ask them to make the sun shine in the long night that we may have meat! Listen, old man: thy belly is flat as pan ice, is it not? Go, then, to the Christian fathers, and ask them to fill it for thee, for ye eat no more with us!"

Old Kidluk dared make no reply, for the Christian fathers were nearly two hundred miles away across the ice and he had neither dogs nor food. He crept into a corner and tremblingly covered his head with a robe. And again Komeuk found Ulukshak's eyes resting upon him, and his limbs shook.

Next day old Kidluk, beset with apprehension, left the settlement to be alone and think upon what his fate was to be. Already weak with hunger he was powerless to force himself against the will of Ulukshak, and as he stumbled over the ice blocks he debated his chances of stealing a dog team and attempting to reach the safety of the mission. To the south, below the horizon, the midday sun showed a faint luminance, but insufficient to cast a shadow, so that Kidluk knew nothing of Ulukshak's swift and stealthy pursuit. The chase had its termination in a deep crevasse, and Ulukshak, well content, returned to the settlement.

But he had been seen by Kowkoteah who was out trying for seal holes; and he told the others. And although they did not dare openly to remonstrate, Ulukshak learned that they knew and from whose lips they had heard it, and he smiled but said nothing.

Night after night passed. The headman lived in a growing religious frenzy, which spread its taint among the others. Centuries of superstition and witchcraft under the frosty stars are not wiped out in a generation, and taboos that were ancient when Eric the Red drove across the northern seas were revived in the community house on Desolation Gulf. Savage rites and incantations to the flickering lances of the northern lights—the visible respirations of the Almighty—added fuel to Ulukshak's fanaticism and brought his people completely under his spell.

THE headman conducted a witch hunt. Half naked and armed with a seal spear he stamped around the room in the half light, to the monotonous drumming of Mukeing, the *angakok,* who had become his reluctant vassal. The others sat in a fascinated ring, watching him, swayed by the wild extravagance of his words.

"I am the father of the stars and of the ghost lights that stab the belly of the sky," he wailed. "The gales are my children, and the Spirits of Good and Evil. And they tell me that one among you holds imprisoned the kindest of my servants."

His shadow leaped grotesquely over the walls. Suddenly it fell upon the squatting form of Kowkoteah, and stopped.

"Man of too many eyes, where have you hid the charm that was the Christmas gift of the Christian fathers?"

And Kowkoteah, who, in addition to being witness to Ulukshak's crime, had had the ill fortune to shoot one of the headman's favorite dogs while aiming at a bear, many years before, went to his sleeping place and brought out a treasured cake of pink scented soap. Ulukshak impaled it on his spear and passed it around for each to sniff in turn.

"Smell the presence of the Spirits of Plenty, locked within and powerless to help us, as the white men imprisoned the mighty hunting soul of Ulukshak, who now is Nakongmek! I will dissolve their bonds, but if they do not come forth then Kowkoteah must die!"

A vessel of melted snow was brought to boil, and the cake of soap dropped in. Kowkoteah, who expected no mercy, prayed the kind Spirits of Plenty to save him; but as the water boiled away, and the acrid smoke of the scorching sediment racked their starved frames with coughing, and stung their eyes to tears, hope died. Ulukshak's brow was black. He turned to the *angakok.*

"What do you say, Master of Magic?"

And Mukeing, the *angakok,* fearful for his own life, gave the answer that the headman desired.

"You heard, Kowkoteah?"

There was a moment's pause, then Ulukshak spoke again, sharply.

"Neageuk! Kedlappik!"

The two arose from their places, and between them the weeping Kowkoteah was led out into the snow. Ulukshak shouted after them.

"Let his soul not hasten. Soon there will be another to keep it company."

His eyes roved about the circle, rested rested lightly on Komeuk and passed on.

The two executioners led Kowkoteah along the banks of the Strange People River, to a point two hundred yards or so from the settlement. They hurried, for the distant stars snapped with the cold and the air bit into them like razored arrow tips.

"It is hard to die like this, brothers," Kowkoteah complained.

"Come—you are hard to please. At least it is better than starving," said Neageuk, the halfwit, and pierced him with his knife.

Kowkoteah threshed about on the ice while they stood over him and watched. Neageuk bent over him for a second blow, but Kedlappik, who was Kowkoteah's friend, grew impatient.

"Never mind," he said. "It is too cold to stay out here merely to kill a man. The frost will finish him."

Overhead, the myriad radiances of the sky flashed through the awesome corridors of space and gleamed upon the polar world, locked in its icy shroud. They showed the two Eskimos hurrying back to the warmth of the house, and threw tiny splinters of light from the dry snow furrows that marked the passage of Silent McKenzie's sled as he drew near to the settlement on Desolation Gulf. Clouds of steam from man and dogs obscured the trail, but the beasts had scented human habitation and needed no guidance.

WITHIN the house Neageuk, the halfwit, exhibited his knife to Ulukshak, whose eyes burned exultantly.

"So it soon will be with all the enemies of Nakongmek!" he cried, and thumped the head of Kowkoteah's woman to still her wailing. "There is still among us one who betrayed the headman of his people to the white man."

Komeuk's heart pounded in his throat. He crept nearer the door, and Ulukshak affected not to notice. His voice rose to a bull roar.

"Who had the mighty spirit of Nakongmek chained to a cell? Who brought among us starvation and cold such as our fathers never knew? Speak up! For Death sharpens his teeth! What vile name thunders down across the sky until the very stars shrink from its passing?"

His wild eyes pulled the group to their feet, aroused them to fanatic lust for sacrifice, regardless of age or sex. They shouted:

"*Komeuk!*"

The condemned man dashed for the exit, screaming, but Ulukshak was swifter. With upraised knife he threw himself upon the informer. Komeuk fought him off but again was brought down, and Ulukshak caught his head in the crook of his powerful arm and twisted it back to expose the throat. He lifted his fist to drive the blade home; and the next instant a terrific kick numbed his arm to the shoulder and sent the knife spinning. Ulukshak glared up into the frost scaled, impassive face of Silent McKenzie.

He jumped to his feet, his eyes diamond points of malignity.

"You maggot! You have nearly broken my arm!"

"It should have been your neck," said the policeman calmly.

"What are you doing here? What do you want?"

McKenzie did not answer. He thought to himself, "He's looney, for sure." His glance took in the broad, swarthy Eskimo faces, their lank black hair, the high, wide cheek bones, and the narrow, slanted, glittering eyes that never for an instant relaxed their grip upon his own.

His mind cut through and beyond the heated, emotional atmosphere of the room and saw a tenantless waste of ice and snow, limited only by the blackness of the long polar night; tortured by the wind into fantastic shapes and split into black crevasses by the steel fingers of the appalling frost at seventy degrees below. Long weeks of undernourishment and mental strain had transformed these normally tractable people into bloodthirsty wolves; and he knew that here was no place for usual police methods. Arbuthnot said he had no imagination. By God, he'd have to have some now, for the slightest false move would cost him his life. The Eskimos were closing around him, in a shaggy, menacing ring.

Ulukshak waved them back.

"Leave him to me," he croaked. Bent nearly double he crept toward McKenzie, but the policeman did not move. The headman padded about him in a slow circular dance, making passes with his hands and intoning a howling crescendo.

"I am Nakongmek, God of the Arctic, Lord of the sleety gales, master of hunger and the lives of men. The white man's will sways to the breath of Nakongmek like grass in the wind, and his hours are few. Speak, my people. Who is the Tongue of Fire and the Heart of Ice?"

"Nakongmek . . . Lord of all!" they intoned.

Again he drew near the constable and lightly touched his rifle.

"I cast my charm upon his weapon, and his bullets turn to water. What can he do against the magic of Nakongmek?"

Silent McKenzie grunted. His mind was made up. He drew forth pipe and tobacco, and shaving off a few slices rubbed them between his palms, and crammed them into the well charred bowl. He struck a light and the cloud of blue smoke drifted to the nostrils of the Eskimos, arousing in them intense longing, and effectively dissolving the hysteria in the air. Deliberately, then, he turned his back on Ulukshak's caperings and squatted before the wavering yellow flame of the lamp. He said evenly:

"Your magic smells to me like a dead fish under the summer sun. Your mouth is full of words, but what have you to show? Do you dare to match your magic against mine?"

Ulukshak was surprised to stillness. McKenzie went imperturbably on.

"I close my eyes, and on the background of darkness figures move. I see a woman lying bleeding on the snow, and the killer running back to tell Ulukshak that his command has been obeyed. I see an ancient man, starved and skinny, stumbling feebly across the ice toward Cape Deception, and another figure with death in his heart moving in pursuit. They disappear behind a hill of ice. Presently the murderer returns, but the old man is seen no more. *Don't move!*"

Ulukshak had emitted a bellow of rage; but when the muzzle of the policeman's rifle swung around he subsided, muttering. McKenzie went on:

"There is more to tell. Three men come from a snow banked house, and walk to the bank of the Strange People River. A knife blade gleams red in the starlight, and but two men return. That is my magic! Can you, too, Ulukshak, speak of things that your eyes have not seen?"

A murmur of awe swept about the room. Ulukshak's face glistened with sweat, and fear crept into his slits of eyes.

"You are clever, white man," he sneered. "Perhaps you can prove all this?"

"Perhaps," said McKenzie. "For what is impossible to one who can give life to the dead?"

"That is a lie!" Ulkshak shouted, with frothing lips. "Even I, Nakongmek, cannot do that!"

Silent McKenzie held up his hand.

"Listen! I hear a small voice crying down the wind. Make no move till I return!"

Quickly he walked to the door and was gone.

Black almond eyes sought each other. The children whimpered, unheeded. Kedlappik addressed the headman with trembling voice.

"You cast a spell upon his rifle and turned his bullets to water, you said! Are you afraid of water, that you shrink when the little steel ring points to your heart?"

"Wait!" cried Ulukshak desperately. "You will see how I deal with this impostor! Tell them, Mukeing, the *angakok*. Is the white man's magic more powerful than that of Nakongmek?"

"Of Nakongmek, no! But of Ulukshak——"

Ulukshak struck him heavily across the mouth.

"You and Komeuk are brothers, it seems! You shall see . . ."

Silent McKenzie returned. He walked straight up to the headman and touched him on the chest.

"You call yourself Nakongmek. He who was latest dead stands outside the door, and would thaw his soul against the lamp flame! Do you dare to shout his name?"

The face of Ulukshak, the headman, was drained of its color. He looked from the policeman to one after another of his people, and saw in their eyes only expectation and merciless condemnation if he refused. His lips moved without sound. Then summoning his courage he shouted, terribly:

"Kowkoteah!"

His flesh pimpled as the door swung slowly open, and the pallid face and blood-stained body of the man he had ordered killed stood in the entrance, with hollow, accusing eyes fixed full upon him.

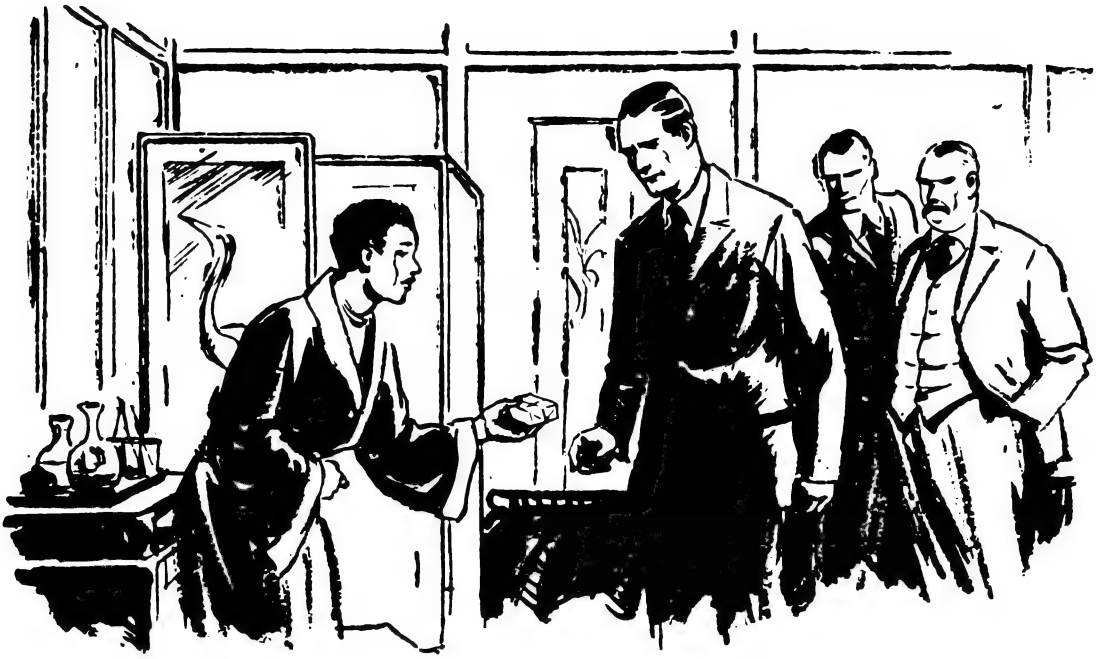
A woman screamed. Ulukshak's hand darted to his seal spear, and as it whipped forward Silent McKenzie shot out his fist. Ulukshak went out like a clubbed seal.

WITH a great pot of stewing meat on the fire sending its welcome aroma through the room, and Ulukshak, securely trussed, lying against the wall, Silent McKenzie squatted before the cheerful light of an oil lamp, and wrote in his diary one of the longest entries in his career.

70 below. April 5. Twelve miles. Calm in morning. Nooned one hour. Slight N. W. wind in afternoon. Lead dog's leg broken in fight. Shot him. Reached settlement Desolation Gulf, mouth Strange People River 10.20 P. M. Near village found native Kowkoteah with knife wound in chest. Not serious. Deposed that Ulukshak killed Kidluk and instigated murder of woman Napniakuk and attempted murder of deponent. Kowkoteah refused to reenter house, so placed him in nearby igloo and interviewed Ulukshak. Later returned with Kowkoteah and placed Ulukshak under arrest. Distributed food to settlement. Bacon poor, but eatable. Patrol so far without incident.

Silent McKenzie paused with a stub of pencil to his lips. They unbent, into what almost might have been taken for a smile, as he added:

Ulukshak crazy as a cuckoo. Must tell Arbuthnot imagination works wonders—sometimes.



THE MINAMOTO PEARL

Japan—and The Innocent Guile of the East

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

TOKYO was settling down for the night. The traveling bazaar people on the Ginza were extinguishing their acetylene flares, and the main thoroughfare of the capital began to doze. Across the Sumida River in the Fukagawa quarter, the fisher folk and others whose day begins with the dawn, were asleep even earlier. The deep-voiced bell of the Fudo temple was long silent. The narrow, odorous street on which was located the Kranz-Verhoet antique factory was dark and deserted.

In the front room of the Kranz-Verhoet abode, however, company was being expected. It was a small, typically Japanese room, bare in its simplicity. In one wall was an alcove sheltering an imitation Hiroshige print and a fraudulently ancient Satsuma vase. Opposite was a small safe, towering above an ankle-high Japanese desk. At an unpainted European table of pine in the center of the room, the two antique manufacturers were awaiting the fifth victim of the Minamoto pearl.

Sigmund Kranz, a fat-faced man with hair the color of faded straw curling up from a low forehead, sat peering through gold-rimmed spectacles at a revolver he was cleaning. Opposite him John Verhoet, as smooth as his slick hair-comb, was playing solitaire.

In an adjoining room Jukichi Sato, Japanese clerk and general factotum, was droning prayers. Sato was eighteen or twenty-eight—the age of Japanese youth is often hard to determine—shaven-headed, vacant-eyed, and expressionless. Attired in a gray-and-white checkered kimono, he knelt in an alcove before his god-shelf. On the shelf were three ancestor tablets of black and gold lacquer, arising from the chalices of carved lotus blossoms, a small picture of the Mikado draped with the Japanese flag, and a six-inch Buddha in an attitude of contemplation.

The Buddha was the gift of Sigmund Kranz, and was one of the minor products of the firm, being made in a bronze that was largely antimony, as cheap as it was unsubstantial. Kranz had gone in for Buddhas after he had established his line of fine green Dresden jade, imported from Germany to be sold to tourists at fancy prices as the real Oriental article. Like his jade, Kranz was of Teutonic origin, but he had acquired an almost perfect American veneer. Extended sojourns in several of America's best jails had given him command of the language and manners. After jade and Buddhas, he began converting bone carvings into aged ivory by boiling in *yasah* juice. Then he had acquired a smoke house in which brocades could be made centuries old in a few weeks. Later he had taken a partner in the person of John Verhoet, a dark, dapper young man who was not sure where he had been born, but was certain of felony convictions in four countries, to say nothing of an indictable misdemeanor in Los Angeles.

But the Minamoto pearl was Kranz's idea. He had used it before the partnership was formed. The pearl was to hook the moneyed collectors who were too wise and too rich to come within the realm of the wholesale sucker trade. The victim was given a glimpse of the pearl in great secrecy—made necessary by the whispered fact that it once belonged to the powerful Minamoto family and was being sought by the Japanese government to be restored to the Imperial Museum, whence it had been stolen. If he showed himself a prospect, the victim was brought to the obscure address in the Fukagawa quarter. Here he was allowed to verify the pearl, to see for himself that it was unusually perfect, large and costly. When he produced the money—never less than twenty thousand *yen*—the gem was placed in its case and wrapped by the young Japanese, Sato, who then deftly exchanged the case for one containing a Venetian imitation. The victim never came back. First, he could never find the house in the tortuous streets of Tokyo, in a quarter he had seen only at night. And second, he was given to understand that he was engaging in somewhat of a bootleg transaction—buying an object which rightfully belonged to the Imperial collection—and was consequently afraid of involving himself with the police.

Sato was quite skilful at exchanging the real for the false pearl. He had once been assistant to a magician in Asakusa Park. Even Kranz admired the way he made the shift while squatting behind his toy desk. That was the only reason that Kranz tolerated him, for the lad's religious and patriotic devotions irritated his employer not a little. At this very moment, in fact, Sato was getting on Kranz's nerves with a vengeance.

"*Namu Amida Butsu . . . Namu Amida Butsu . . . Na-a-a-mu Amida Butsu . . .*"

In a high, nasal tenor, Sato was monotonously hailing the eternal splendor of the Buddha. His tedious chant had been whining through the paper partition for fifteen minutes when Kranz suddenly shouted:

"Sato!"

"*Namu Amida Butsu . . . Namu Amida Butsu . . . . . . Na-a-a . . .*"

"Sato! Damn you, will you quit that yowling and come here when I call you!"

Sato slid back the paper *shoji* and came.

"Very sorry," said Sato. "But just now making Japanese prayah."

"Damn your prayers!" Kranz continued. "You know I can't stand that infernal hocus-pocus. Cut it out!"

"Very sorry," came the rejoinder, "but this night Matsuri festivaru. Maybe bettah I go make prayah at Fudo."

"You'll go nowheres tonight," Kranz declared. "We've got a customer for the pearl coming in half an hour. You'll stay right here."

"Then I finish making prayah at home-made *kami-dana*, I think so," said Sato, turning to reenter his room.

Kranz caught the sleeve of the lad's kimono and pulled the youth roughly toward him.

"I'll be damned if you keep up that tomfoolery when there's serious work to be done," Kranz shouted. He sent Sato staggering across the room with a resounding slap on the ear. "You stay here in this room."

Sato instantly resumed his impassive dignity and stared at Kranz without reproach. Then he went in silence to his corner, seated himself behind his diminutive desk, drew his bare toes under him, and took an English primer from the drawer. In a moment he was droning again—more softly, this time—the text from the pages of his book.

"The . . . boy . . . is fry-ing . . . the ky-to . . . The ky-to . . . is say-ring . . . high uppu . . . in the su-ky . . ."

VERHOET finished his game of solitaire, threw the cards on the table, and looked at his watch.

"I guess I'd better go after Waldemar Smith," he said.

"Wait a minute," said Kranz, squinting through the barrel of his revolver, prior to loading it. "I want you to pack this with you."

"What's the idea?" objected Verhoet. "If you think I'm going to stick him up, you're all wrong. I don't like working in the street. There's always one of these pesky little cops rattling his saber some place in the neighborhood. I'd rather bring him out here and take his money away from him decently."

"I don't like the looks of that man," Kranz admitted. "He had a funny glimmer in his eye when he took a peek at the pearl in the Imperial Hotel bar this afternoon."

"That was unrequited love—for the pearl," said Verhoet. "It's a good sign. It means he'll have his bank roll with him tonight."

"Maybe," said Kranz, "but I'm suspicious. He's too big and husky to have a name like Waldemar."

"He's a millionaire," explained Verhoet, "and a millionaire named Smith would have to have a funny handle like Waldemar to keep him from getting lost in the phone book. Anyhow, what are you afraid for?"

Kranz nodded his head toward the safe.

"The Minamoto pearl," he said.

"Why?"

"Because it *is* the Minamoto pearl," said Kranz. "I never told you before, but that story we been handing out about the pearl being stolen from the Imperial Museum is true. The guy that copped it got himself killed, and I bought it off his partner—cheap. It's the goods, all right, the real Minamoto pearl . . ."

A loud sneeze caused the two men to turn in Sato's direction.

"Many frowahs . . . aru broo-ming . . . in the garu-den," droned the Japanese youth, his head buried in his book.

"That Jap kid'll drive me nuts yet," Kranz commented.

"Well," said Verhoet, "he may be a little peculiar, but he's got his talents. Don't kick him out until after he does his stuff tonight. I'm going to bring Smith here, anyhow. I don't think he's a dick. He looks too intelligent."

"Suit yourself," said Kranz, with a shrug of his round shoulders. "Only remember I warned you."

Verhoet went out, rattling the wooden shutters in place behind him.

Kranz walked nervously about the tiny room, his feet making scarcely any noise on the heavy matting. Several times he paused by the entrance shutters to listen. The silence was broken once by a queer birdlike call, a series of plaintive, reedy notes, announcing that the vender of *soba* was in the neighborhood. Once the long, two-wheeled, hand-propelled cart of the night-soil gatherer clattered by, disseminating a hair-raising stench that crashed its way into the farthest cranny of the house. Then silence closed in again, thicker and more odorous.

Even Sato was silent. Kranz turned to find the reason. Only the top of the lad's shaven head was visible. He was apparently asleep on his open book.

Kranz stepped over to swing a square-toed shoe against the boy's posterior.

"Snap out of it, Jap boy," Kranz snarled. "You got business ahead tonight."

Sato looked at him with the eyes of a hurt child. Without a word he went on reading where he had left off.

"Ro-ses . . . aru reddo . . . and vio-retsu . . . aru brue . . ." he droned.

Kranz turned from him. The pat-pat of *kuruma* pullers' feet sounded outside. They stopped. Someone grunted.

The shutters slid back, and Verhoet entered, followed by an impressive-looking man twice his breadth and half again his height. The newcomer stooped in order to avoid bumping his bald spot on the unpainted beam of the low Japanese doorway.

"Good evening, Mr. Smith," said Kranz cordially, his smile disclosing the gleam of a gold tooth. "Please excuse this shack, but we live in this little Jap house for protection. The Minamoto pearl is safer in an out-of-the-way place like this."

"You can't be too careful," agreed Waldemar Smith in a bass voice. He looked about him with a slow, deliberate glance. A subcutaneous beard darkened his freshly shaved lower jaw.

Verhoet placed three glasses on the table.

"According to Japanese custom," he said, "we ought to serve tea before doing any business. But since we keep our shoes on in this house, I guess you won't mind breaking tradition and drinking a little Occidental beverage, will you, Mr. Smith?"

"A very little for me . . . Whoa, thanks," said Waldemar Smith, extending a hairy hand on which a man-sized diamond flashed.

"And now," said Kranz, smacking his lips, "let's get down to business with the good old American snap."

He walked to the safe, gave the combination a few swift twirls, opened the steel door, and removed a purple plush case. This he opened on Sato's native desk, placed the pearl on the palm of his hand, and returned to the European table.

Kranz extended his hand before the eager eyes of Waldemar Smith. The precious spheroid, as big as a grape, lay there in all its bluish-white splendor. An iridescent gleam, which seemed to emanate from the very heart of the gem, gave a translucent sheen to its satiny surface. The beauty of a thousand sunsets on the snowy crest of Fuji-san was concentrated in this globule.

"May I?" inquired Waldemar Smith, reaching for the pearl.

"Why—certainly," Kranz replied.

Smith took the gem tenderly between his thumb and forefinger, carrying it to the tip of his tongue. An imitation would warm up almost instantly. The Minamoto pearl remained cold.

Kranz and Verhoet followed Smith's movements intently.

"Suppose I should swallow this pearl—accidentally, of course,'" suggested Smith, noting the nervous eyes fixed on him. He gave a low chuckle.

"We have a good medicine chest handy," Kranz replied

"We'd save your health from the danger of foreign matter in your system," added Verhoet.

Smith laughed again and placed the pearl on the table. He contemplated it in silence for a moment.

"The boy . . . is eat-ing . . . pea-natsu," droned Sato.

The three men turned toward Sato. He had two books open before him, and was bending over an ink block and sheet of rice paper. With a writing brush he was laboriously tracing English script.

"What's the idea of the human phonograph?" inquired Smith.

"It's our clerk," explained Kranz. "He's learning English."

"He studies out loud," Verhoet added.

"He looks like a monkey," Smith commented.

"And the pearl?" asked Kranz. "What does it look like to you?"

"Like a bargain," was the reply. "What was the figure you quoted this afternoon?"

"Just twenty thousand *yen*," said Verhoet. "In cash."

"That's a lot of *yen*," said Waldemar Smith.

"The pearl's worth that many dollars in the States," argued Kranz. "We're letting it go cheap because—of circumstances."

"Besides, twenty thousand *yen* isn't much for a millionaire like you, Mr. Smith," added Verhoet.

"It's plenty for anybody," countered Smith. "But I want the pearl."

He reached for the gem, but Kranz's fingers closed on it first.

"I'll put it back in the case for you," said Kranz, getting up. "You can't tell what might happen to a little jigger like that if you carry it loose in your pocket."

He stepped to Sato's desk and ostentatiously deposed the pearl in the silk-lined interior of the case.

"Hey, skibby," said Kranz disdainfully. "Wrap this up for Mr. Smith."

Then he returned to his seat.

SATO put down his brush, carefully folded the rice paper on which he had been writing, and closed his books.

"A little speed there, boy," ordered Verhoet.

Sato opened the drawer in his little desk and took out a sheet of pine-green paper. With a flourish he flashed it for a moment between the plush case and the three men watching him. The small purple box disappeared from view for only a fraction of a second, but this was sufficient. When the green paper lay flat on the table, the case reposing in its center was not the one containing the Minamoto pearl. Although he watched every swishing movement of Sato's full kimono sleeves, Waldemar Smith could not have seen the substitution.

Even Kranz and Verhoet, who knew what was going on, could not detect the actual exchange.

Smith, however, was suspicous.

"Never mind wrapping it up," he said, as Sato began to fold the paper about the case. "I'll just take the little box the way it is."

"Certainly, Mr. Smith, any way you want," said Verhoet easily. Why shouldn't he? The trick had been worked—neatly, too, Verhoet thought—and the real Minamoto pearl now reposed in its case in Sato's drawer. Sato was putting the green paper on top of it and pushing the drawer closed.

"Bring the pearl here, kid," Kranz ordered brusquely.

Sato complied, placing the plush case on the table.

Waldemar Smith picked up his purchase. For a moment the tip of his thumb hesitated on the little nacre catch that kept box closed. He was about to have another look at the pearl.

Anticipating the move that would prematurely reveal the substitution, Verhoet leaned across the table and covered Smith's hand with his, as in a gesture of friendship.

"Mr Smith," he said quickly, looking squarely into the other's steady gray eyes, "there's one thing I want you to promise us. If anything should come up—if anyone should ask you how you came to have the Minamoto pearl—just forget you ever saw us. Say you bought it from a Japanese. You won't let us down, now, will you?"

The suspicion of a smile played about the corners of Smith's eyes as he looked from Verhoet to Kranz, both leaning forward anxiously.

"You can count on me," he said slowly. "No one will ever know from me where I got the pearl."

Then he slipped the jewel case unopened into his side coat pocket. Kranz and Verhoet relaxed again.

"Good," said Verhoet, relieved.

"And now," said Kranz, "about—about the little matter of payment."

"Yes, of course," said Smith. "Twenty thousand, you said?"

"Twenty thousand," repeated Verhoet.

"In thousand-*yen* notes," added Kranz.

"I remember," said Smith.

He stood up. Slowly he inserted his right hand into the inner breast pocket of his blue serge coat. Quickly he withdrew it. The fingers clutched, not a billfold, but a short, black automatic.

"Up with your hands, gentlemen—quickly!" he directed politely.

The surprised Kranz and Verhoet obeyed promptly.

"You too, kid," added Smith, perceiving Sato fumbling in the drawer of his desk. "Quick! Hands up!"

Sato's brown arms immediately arose from the ample sleeves of his kimono.

Kranz threw a sidelong glance at Verhoet, which seemed to say: "What did I tell you?"

Verhoet disregarded him.

"Why, Mr. Smith," ventured Verhoet. "There must be some mistake."

"No mistake at all," said Smith calmly, holding his gun leveled. "I promised I wouldn't tell a soul where I got the Minamoto pearl. I won't. If anyone asks you where it is, you can say it's been stolen again."

"But," interrupted Kranz.

"But," continued Waldemar Smith, "I happen to be in a great hurry, so I can't stop and chat with you. You'll greatly oblige me if you keep your hands in that position until I'm well outside the door."

He began to back away slowly under cover of his automatic.

Kranz saw twenty thousand *yen* walking out the door backwards and felt that something should be done about it.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Smith," he lied, "that wooden shutters are locked. I always lock them at night—for precaution. You'll need the key."

"Where is the key?"

"In my pocket."

"All right," said Smith. "Tell me which pocket it's in, and walk toward me slowly. Remember that this gun is loaded, and that my trigger finger is trembling a little."

Kranz walked slowly.

"Stop!" Smith ordered. "Far enough."

Kranz stopped. Suddenly he lurched to one side, dropped to the floor, and drove a mulelike kick into Smith's shins.

The automatic barked, but the bullet imbedded itself harmlessly in the wall of the alcove, above an imitation of Hiroshige's Thirty Sixth View of Fuji.

Waldemar Smith stumbled forward, his pistol spinning from his hand.

Sato ducked out of the room into his own quarters.

Verhoet pounced on the automatic.

Smith banged the head of the recumbent Kranz against the floor, leaped to his feet, seized the table in his brawny hands, and hurled it across the room before Verhoet had a chance to aim. The flying piece of furniture knocked Verhoet into the *kakemono* alcove and broke the fake Satsuma vase.

Almost before the noise of the crash had subsided, Smith was gone.

"THE dirty crook!" exclaimed Verhoet mournfully when he had recovered his breath.

"You picked a fine, honest millionaire this time!" jeered Kranz.

"I got to admit he took unfair advantage of us," said Verhoet. "But after all, the last laugh is on him. Won't he bite his nails, though, when he gets home and finds that all he got for his trouble was a handsome Venetian glass bead?"

"Which reminds me," said Kranz, "that your millionaire's shot maybe woke up the neighbors, and first thing you know we'll have a couple of those sassy little Jap cops prowling around here. If they found the genuine Minamoto pearl reposing in our midst, they might take it back."

"Right," agreed Verhoet. "I'll ditch it."

He stooped over the clerk's diminutive desk, pulled out the drawer, and took up the purple plush jewel case he found there. He smiled to himself as he contemplated it. After all, the joke was on Waldemar Smith. His finger pressed the nacre catch and the top of the box sprang open.

Verhoet's smile vanished.

"That stupid little rat!" he exclaimed.

"What's up?" inquired Kranz, alarmed, coming to Verhoet.

"That damned Jap half-wit bungled the deal." There were tears of desperate rage in Verhoet's voice. "He didn't make the usual shift. That crooked bozo Smith's got the real Minamoto pearl after all."

"Let's see." Kranz snatched the jewel case. He picked up the anaemic-looking globule reposing on the silk pad, and crushed it between his thumb and forefinger. The fragments of the imitation sifted to the matting.

For a full ten seconds Kranz was too disgusted to open his mouth. Then he poured forth a stream of violent expletives, gaudy invective, and sulphurous abuse.

"And to think I gave that Jap credit for having brains," muttered Verhoet. "Wait till I catch that slant-eyed mud-head. I'll knock his stupid teeth down his throat!" He slid back the *shoji* leading to Sato's room. "Sato! Sato, damn you, where are you?"

"Never mind the Jap!" interrupted Kranz. "The business of importance right now is to chase that fraud Waldemar Smith and get back the Minamoto pearl. Grab that gun and come on. He's got a big start on us."

"Where do you expect to pick up that bird in these crazy Tokyo streets at this time of night?" inquired Verhoet.

Kranz took his arm and pushed him toward the entrance.

"He'll have to cross the river," said Kranz. "He'll probably hit one of the two nearest bridges—the Eita bridge or the Shin Ohashi. You head for one and I'll take the other. Let's go."

The two men squeezed through the opening left in the wooden shutters by the departing Smith. It was two steps to cross the six-by-six garden—three stunted pines, a tiny pond, and a dark stone lantern—that separated the house from the street gate. But the partners had taken only one step when they collided abruptly with an imposing and bulky mass that they felt instantly to be Waldemar Smith.

Two hands dived into two pockets for weapons, but the muscular arms of Waldemar Smith encircled Kranz and Verhoet in one brutal embrace, holding their elbows to their sides.

"One moment, gentlemen," said Smith. "No violence, please. I've come back on friendly business."

As the two men still struggled he released them just long enough to bump their heads together. Then he pushed them rudely into the house ahead of him.

"Now, listen," he said, his voice betraying a slight note of anger. "The fact that I've come back shows my mission is friendly. I'm not armed. So be civil."

He picked up the overturned table from the alcove. He set the chairs about it, and motioned the two men to sit down. Verhoet, however, felt Smith's pockets before he dropped into a chair.

"Gentlemen," said Waldemar Smith,

"after my rather unceremonious departure from this house a few moments ago, it occurred to me that you were a pair of exceedingly smooth operators. Now it happens that I have a very important deal coming off in Shanghai next week, and I would greatly appreciate the assistance of two able business associates. There'll be big money in it. Will you join me?"

Kranz glanced inquiringly at Verhoet.

"No artillery on him," said Verhoet.

Kranz drew his gun.

"Mr. Smith," he said, "your proposition may interest us. But first we want the Minamoto pearl back."

Smith threw back his head and laughed.

"We're serious, now," Verhoet declared. "That's an absolute condition."

"Gentlemen," said Smith, "it is because the Minamoto pearl will be invaluable to me that I have returned to talk to you. I want to buy an interest in it—on the level, this time."

Verhoet's brow wrinkled in a puzzled frown. Kranz frowned with annoyance.

"You've got the whole pearl," said Verhoet.

"And we demand it back," said Kranz, elevating his revolver.

Smith laughed again.

"Listen," he said. "I've stolen better pearls than you'll ever see. I know my pearls. And I assure you that this Christmas tree ornament you pawned off on me never saw an oyster."

"You've got the Minamoto pearl," Kranz insisted.

"Cut the comedy," replied Smith, taking the purple plush jewel case from his pocket. "Look at this and then tell me without laughing that it isn't phoney."

HE SNAPPED open the case, disclosing an anaemic glass spheroid, shimmering faintly.

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed Verhoet.

"You've switched it on us," snapped Kranz. "You've got the real thing salted away."

"As one upstanding yegg to another," replied Smith earnestly, "I assure you that I haven't got the Minamoto pearl. If I had it, why should I come back here?"

Animated by a single thought, Kranz and Verhoet rose together.

"I wonder—" began Kranz. Then he turned and shouted: "Sato!"

"If that kid—" Verhoet ventured. Then he sprang to Sato's desk, jerked out the drawer, and dumped the contents on the table. A dozen little purple cases tumbled out—the boxes containing the imitation pearls.

"Probably," said Verhoet nervously, "it's in one of these."

Kranz and Waldemar Smith watched him anxiously as he opened one after another of the gem cases. One after another contained only the unmistakably false Venetian imitations. Ten of them Verhoet opened feverishly, throwing them down with such force that the synthetic gems bounded about the table and rolled off. In the eleventh there was not even an imitation pearl—only a wad of folded rice paper.

Kranz snatched the paper from Verhoet and unfolded it. On it were a few sentences scrawled in broad, uneven brush strokes. The letters were ill formed and badly aligned.

The message read:

> *Minamoto familly are grately historick Japanese familly so for honor of Mikado late Minamoto pearl is hear buy returning to boosum of Imperial Museum by unworthless but virtuous hand of yrs respectvly,*
>
> *SATO JUKICHI.*
>
> *P. S. Verry sorry disturbing previuss planns, therefor please to keeping of back week wages Yen 3.75.*

Kranz crumpled the paper and threw it fiercely to the floor. He glared at Verhoet in silence. Verhoet was dazed.

Waldmar Smith extracted a cigar from his vest pocket and thoughtfully unwrapped the tin foil.

"Under the circumstances," said Smith, "I'd like to reconsider my offer of partnership. I'm not sure I want to tie myself up with men who get themselves skunked by a Japanese schoolboy."

He struck a match, puffed for a moment, then turned to Kranz.

"What have you got to say?" he asked.

"What have you got to say? Kranz asked Verhoet. "Anything?"

"Yes," said Verhoet, arising and going to a cupboard. "I've got an important suggestion to make. Let's all get drunk."

CHAPTER I

SANTO COMES TO TOWN

SALTPETER, human derelict and much below par mentally, was one of the few men in Tucson who worried none. Among some six hundred as desperate characters as ever isolated themselves far from law and order, he went and came unconcerned, his vacuous grin and unkempt person being his passport. The fact he worked fitfully in Gringo Bell's gambling and drinking place perhaps benefited him when among certain rough characters. It surely would have prejudiced him in the estimation of another element, enemies of Bell, if not for his mental blight.

He worked spasmodically, when his strange whim did not call him from the long, low dobe one story building.

When first seen picking up worthless bits of rock and dropping them through the window of an abandoned mud box of a house, he caused grim amusement. On observing the tall, sparse figure, bent well forward, and the mat of shaggy hair falling from beneath the ruins of a discarded sombrero, some wit would cry out:

"Saltpeter's prospectin' ag'in."

Further proof of his mild idiocy was shown by the house he selected for holding his treasure of rubbish. The door to it was made fast with a chain. Men had died there of smallpox. At the outset it amused the calloused wretches to see the halfwit sweat and work at his useless task. A refugee from New Mexico asked him how he would remove the ore.

His answer, "When I git it full it'll fall out the winder", was bandied about as something terrifically amusing. After the citizens became used to him, he remained as unnoticed as a shade. Some of the Mexican women pitied him and would have been kind if not for his shyness in the presence of the sex. He always was welcome among the friendly Apaches, who lived near the town to escape being slaughtered by their wild brothers. He had been touched by the Great Mystery. He was medicine.

Bell gave him his nickname of "Saltpeter." Bell was apt to further muddle his few wits at times with a savage kick, although he would resent such abuse on

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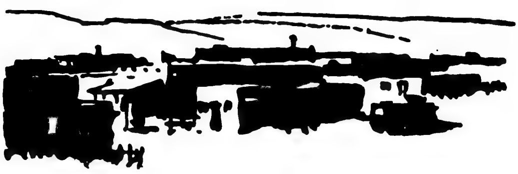


A Complete Novelette

WOLF MEAGHER

A Tale of the Wild Days of Tucson

By HUGH PENDEXTER

the part of another as being a reflection on his leadership. Saltpeter went and came, existing on scraps of food. He slept in the cookroom of The Great Southern, Bell's place, in the Indian village, and often in the plaza among the rubbish. None pitied him, for pity was an unknown commodity when Tucson was the wickedest spot in the Americas. He was of no more account than a hog wallowing in the street, or a dead mule none had bothered to remove. His lank person, covered indifferently with cast off garments, intruded when robberies and murders were being discussed. He was as impersonal as a stray dog.

Only in the one thing was he consistent: the gathering up of bits of rock and dropping them through the window of the locked pesthouse. Sometimes an ore train from the south would rattle off lumps of rock in passing through the town to follow the road to and down the Gila. Such prizes were eagerly gathered up and hurried into hiding. A camp bummer once teased him by trying to take a bit of ore from him. Then the smile vanished and the teeth clicked sharply, and the pouting lips tightened in a snarl.

"I'd cut his throat if he didn't hang out at Bell's place," muttered the bummer.

ONE day, when he had ventured a mile down the valley of the Santa Cruz, a gaily attired Mexican rode up and asked him in broken English if he knew where Señor Bell lived. Saltpeter nodded his head and cried:

"I eat there. Sometimes I sleep there. At night, when I sleep I see men killing folks." Then the vacuous grin.

The Mexican crossed himself and eyed the halfwit dubiously. He plucked a piece of paper from his crimson sash, hesitated, then restored it, and directed:

"Go there."

Saltpeter obligingly trotted ahead and led the way through the twisting streets to Bell's resort. The combination gambling room and saloon had but three walls, the bar forming a half wall on the street side. Saltpeter pointed out Bell to the stranger. Bell was watching his men as they served the late afternoon trade, but he was quick to notice the newcomer. His hand darted under the bar for a gun as the Mexican thrust a hand into his sash. The latter urged his mount close to the bar and in Spanish said:

"Señor Bell, I am Señor Santo's man. I bring a writing to you from him."

Bell nodded, but kept his gaze on the hand inside the sash. The Mexican slowly drew forth the folded paper and handed it across the bar. Then he spurred his horse down the narrow, filthy street and disappeared in a southerly direction.

Bell opened the paper and after a quick perusal he folded it and motioned for Saltpeter to come inside. Meeting the halfwit near the door, he ordered:

"Whisky and mescal to my room. Then tell Doc Cranet and Dandy Max to come there. You *sabe?*"

"I *sabe,*" said Saltpeter. He carried two bottles to the small room, which served as sleeping quarters and a place for plotting, and then returned to the main room. At times, as he walked among the tables, he appeared to have forgotten his errand. But when he found himself standing behind Dandy Max, gambler and killer, he touched his shoulder.

Max twisted about and his gaze became infuriated.

"Damn you!" he gritted. "Every time you come near me at a table you change my luck to worse. Get out!"

"He says for you to come," said Saltpeter, grinning widely and pointing to the small room.

Max quit his game and Saltpeter resumed his meandering journey about the room until he found himself standing behind Doc Cranet. Saltpeter waited until Cranet had lost a ten dollar limit pot, and then touched his shoulder. He was recognized and greeted with a volley of curses. He performed his office as messenger and followed Cranet into the room and became busy with opening bottles and setting out glasses.

Once the three were seated, Bell abruptly announced:

"Wolf Meagher's here in Tucson."

These five words caused Dandy Max to halt his half raised glass and to remain as immobile as a figure of stone. Doc Cranet reacted differently. The glass at his lips was jerked aside and spilled the liquor down his white shirt.

Max was the first to find speech.

"Damnation!" There was fear and rage in the one word. "Bell, who told you that?" he hoarsely whispered.

"Santo, down in Sonora. One of his men fetched me a message from him."

He rose and strode to the door and made sure no one was eavesdropping. During the moment the door was ajar, permitting the monotous voices of faro and monte dealers to be heard, plus the ribaldry from the long bar, Max and Cranet exchanged questioning glances. It was common knowledge in Tucson that a small ring of desperate men were planning some big coup. Max and Cranet, members of that vicious ring, were entertaining the same suspicion: that Gringo Bell and Santo, archvillain of Sonora, formed still another and a higher cabal. Santo always wrote to Bell.

BELL returned to the table and splashed out a drink, mopped the sweat from his face, and produced the written message.

"A Mexican, called Black Juan, brought me this a short time ago," he began.

Then smoothing out the paper he read:

"Señor Bell:

"Wolf Meagher is in, or on his way to Tucson. I send this warning by Black Juan. I am coming by another trail. I shall arrive the night of the fourteenth. Beware of all strangers. When in doubt, strike. I will know Meagher when I see him. I have found the trail of what is hidden."

"This is the fourteenth," whispered Max. "Black Juan must have taken his time in getting here . . . Meagher never has worked this far east of Yuma before. How can Santo know?"

"He has spies everywhere. From New Mexico to beyond the Colorado," said Bell. "He says he knows Meagher by sight. Then Meagher must have been down in Sonora. Now he has come here."

"I'd as soon have the devil on my trail," whispered Cranet.

"It's the Grainger business that took Meagher to Sonora," Dandy Max insisted. "He's after Santo, not us. We don't even know where the stuff's hidden."

"Santo knows now," said Bell. "Meagher knows he's coming here and he comes ahead of him, if Santo is correct and not trying some kind of a game on us."

Cranet began to recover his nerve. He bluntly said:

"Santo is lying. He wants us to be busy looking for Meagher, while he sneaks off with the gold. Why didn't he give us a tip in his writing so we could cache the stuff before Meagher gets here to do his spying?"

Bell smiled cynically.

"For the simple reason," he said, "that folks don't trust folks overmuch when it comes to hidden gold."

Max struck one thin hand lightly on the table.

"Santo will do for us after using us," he prophesied.

Bell readily agreed.

"Of course—if he can. Just as he believes we'll do for him if we get a chance. We have a working agreement with him, but it's a mighty loose one."

"But all of us against Meagher," murmured Cranet.

"That's the idea," said Bell. "Until we find and remove Meagher we must all stick together. If it wasn't for Meagher, Santo never would have sent me any message. Just sneaked in and removed the gold . . . Pete, you go outside and watch for a fussy dressed Mexican. Then come here and tell me. *Sabe?"*

Saltpeter grinned broadly.

"I *sabe,"* he replied. "Mexican."

After he had left the room, Bell rested his elbows on the table and earnestly said:

"There isn't one of us who wouldn't like to get all of that gold. That's human nature. But we all know that if any one of us tries a lone hand, it's all up with him as well as with the others. We must sit tight and watch. Santo is the man Wolf Meagher will be trailing. By watching Santo we can spot Meagher. Santo will flush the game for us. I see it this way:

"Meagher went into Mexico from Yuma, after being hired by Grainger's folks up north to learn what had become of the old man. There is nothing to show that they, or Meagher, know Grainger came here on his way to find Aztec treasure in Mexico. Grainger's success is known all over Mexico. He found millions. The governor of Sonora would tell Meagher that he let the old man take away all he could pack on his burros. The governor played straight. Grainger brought out three hundred thousand dollars, and by some miracle dodged the Apaches. He fooled Santo, too, at the start. He got within a mile of this burg before Santo overtook him and killed him. And that was Santo's great mistake. He killed on sight, and there was no gold on the burros except a few pieces in a saddle bag."

"Let's see that piece Santo sent you after he rode back to Sonora empty handed," whispered Cranet.

Bell fished out a short thick plate of gold from his inside coat pocket. It measured three by five inches and was so malleable that one could bend it without much effort.

"What a stake!" gasped Cranet. "The pure quill! A hundred thousand apiece!"

"After we've wiped out Santo and dodged his gang," softly reminded Max.

"It's him, or us," grimly warned Bell. "The stuff's hidden within a few miles of this burg. . . . What is it, Pete? Close that door!"

"Mexicans," reported Saltpeter, and he held up two fingers.

The men rose as one to gain the door, Bell was first. He found two men of the peon class, who lived in the town. With an oath he dismissed them, and told Saltpeter:

"One Mexican in good clothes. Doesn't live here. A stranger. Try again."

The three reseated themselves at the table, and Bell moodily told his partners:

"Santo wouldn't have taken us in on the deal if he didn't need us to stand by him when he goes to get the stuff. It'll take some shooting to bluff the six hundred bad boys in this mud burg. It all goes around in a circle. Goes around to Wolf Meagher. Santo's scared of him and needs our help. Meagher's one bad hombre."

"But Santo may come any time," warned Max. "If he finds us cooped up here he'll think we've been planning some game."

"Once more I ask, who the devil is this Meagher?" Cranet put in, irritably. "Who has seen him? What's he look like?"

"He's old, he's young. He's tall, he's short. Now you know all I know," said Bell.

"I aint losing any sleep over Meagher," said Dandy Max. "What fusses me is Santo. He plans to wipe us out once he has secured the gold. And we can't do for him until the gold's found. Next to Santo, Black Juan is the most dangerous man in Mexico."

"Bah!" jeered Bell. "Black Juan is just another Mexican. Santo is Santo. Our first job is to rub out Wolf Meagher when he shows up. . . . But it's time we scattered."

He led the way into the big room and took his place behind the long bar where he could see all the cream, or scum, of the citizens passing through the narrow street or tarrying to drink.

EXCELLENT specimens of various degrees of outlawry were in the big room. Doc Cranet seated himself at a monte table while Dandy Max assailed a faro layout. To exist in this sanctuary of the lawless required the will and ability to kill. Bell watched the steady stream of money crossing the bar in exchange for mescal and raw whisky. A casual glance at the shifting throng was sufficient. Santo, given to wearing much finery, would be a conspicuous figure. Yet Bell hastily pivoted when a hand touched his arm. He swore under his breath on beholding Saltpeter. The halfwit's eyes were wild as he whispered:

"I saw men killed last night."

"You're always seeing someone killed in your dreams. Clear the stuff from that room and then go to the cookroom and wash dishes."

Saltpeter dutifully turned away, but paused at different tables. Any other man would have been shot or knifed for picking up a stack of chips or a handful of money, to examine them with the curiosity of a child. He stood behind Doc Cranet's chair until that unworthy's luck turned. He passed to Dandy Max, who promptly shifted his bet and played the jack to lose. Darkness came and the oil lamps were lighted.

Now Bell had to peer more closely to keep tabs on the street. Mexican men and women, a few friendly Apaches, and the usual number of bewhiskered fugitives from the States, passed back and forth, with some ever entering to take the places of those who had gone broke at the games.

Whipped at monte, Doc Cranet joined Bell and cursed Saltpeter for spoiling a winning streak. Bell laughed at him and whispered:

"Small losses for a man who will soon rake in a real pot."

"If I get it, that lunatic will spoil my luck."

"You'll use it in playing the tables?" asked Bell.

"What else could I use it for?" grumbled Cranet. "I can't go back home. I can't go anywhere. What else is there to do to keep from going crazy in this cursed hole?"

"I'm for South America with my share," said Bell. "Max plans to hide himself in some big Eastern city. But a new deck for me, and a new deal. South America——"

Two pistol shots broke off the sentence. Pistol shots were ever being heard in Tucson, but these sounded in the small court back of the big room. Doc Cranet, facing in that direction, gave a wheezy scream and pointed at a small opening in the wall which served as a window. Others were staring at this window. The head and shoulders of a man were across the ledge of the window. The man's huge sombrero fell to the floor. He slowly slipped over the sill and one of his dangling hands was clutching a huge dragoon revolver. His long black cloak was suddenly thrown forward to hang to the floor and envelop his head and shoulders. The lining was a bright scarlet.

"It's Santo! Look out! He's on the shoot!" howled a burly Texan as he dropped to the floor behind a table.

Bell went for a gun, but before he could draw, Cranet was crying:

"He's dead! Can't you fools see he's dead, that someone's shoving him through the window?"

A moment of stillness, and then the inmates of the room were crowding forward to investigate. Bell threw out his arms to keep the men back while he tore loose the cloak and studied the silent figure. He called out:

"The gun's full cocked, damn him! He fired at someone and thought he'd scored.

He started to climb up to the window to pot someone in this room. One chamber's empty. He fired first at the man who killed him. Into the court on the jump! Five hundred if you bring in alive the man who rubbed him out."

Doc Cranet crept closer as the men surged through the door and into the street. After examining the dead man he told Bell and Dandy Max:

"He was dead when he came through the window. Fired a shot and cocked the gun and died."

"He was after me," whispered Bell. "Else he wouldn't have been around in the court and under that window."

Dandy Max stepped to the bar and poured himself a long drink. Then he told his two friends:

"Someone's horned into our game. That one shot probably killed three hundred thousand dollars."

"It's more'n that," warned Bell. "It means Wolf Meagher's in town. It means he knows where the gold is cached, or he wouldn't have killed Santo."

CHAPTER II

OLD MIGUEL RIDES FAR

THE shadow of Wolf Meagher, wandering sleuth of the southern frontier, rested heavily on the three men who suspected his presence. In the imagination of the guilty he was retribution. Stage and express companies had used him to great advantage. He was one individual whom the merciless brood feared. He always worked alone. No two who professed to have known him would give the same description. He was old, he was young, Bell had told his friends. Some said he was educated. Others insisted he was unlettered. Men had quarreled as to whether he was fair of complexion, or swart. In one particular did all agree: he was a nemesis. He was the type that evolves into a legendary hero. He took his man away with none realizing he had been near.

For three men the Great Southern became a sanctuary and a fortress. Gringo Bell was wary in approaching the bar. Doc Cranet remained much in the private room during the daylight hours. Dandy Max played the tables with his back to the wall and a six-shooter at his right hand.

Saltpeter washed dishes in a perfunctory manner and then took to the outside world to resume his daily task of collecting bits of rock. Few in town cared to wander down the valley, or up the road toward the Gila River, as the Apaches were at the height of their determination to drive all whites from the territory. Going south from the town through the mile and a half wide valley of the Santa Cruz, one passed through an Eden, if willing to risk a meeting with lurking savages. Mexican women washed clothes by the side of the stream and close to the town, while heavily armed men stood guard. Saltpeter ventured some distance down the valley. Government trains and ore trains from the silver mines, all heavily guarded, met him down the valley and wanted him to turn back, until it became generally known that he was simple and unafraid.

The third morning after Santo's mysterious death Saltpeter was surprised, while picking up stones and pieces of rock, by the sudden appearance of Black Juan from behind a clump of yucca. Behind Juan walked a friendly Apache. The Mexican dropped his hand to the knife in his sash. The Indian seized his arm and said something in Spanish. Saltpeter nodded to the Apache and appeared to be much pleased to see him. He displayed no interest in Black Juan.

Black Juan, impatient, spluttered Spanish oaths and seized the halfwit by the arm and shook him.

"Who keel Señor Santo?" he demanded.

Saltpeter shook his head. He worried his brows into a puzzled frown and said:

"Bad men. I dream of bad men being killed. I dreamed the night before the red cloak was killed that a man would be killed."

Juan made out the gist of this and nodded gloomily. There was much truth to be found in dreams. He spoke to the Indian in Spanish, who fished a scrap of paper from his shirt. Taking it, Black Juan handed it to Saltpeter and said:

"Señor Bell. Pronto!"

Saltpeter nodded and promptly set off at a trot for the town. On passing the pesthouse he stopped and stuck his head through the window. One of the loungers shouted abuse and told a companion:

"He oughter be stopped from foolin' round that place. He'll be catchin' it an' givin' it to us."

"Tell that to Gringo Bell," said the other man. "If he can take the risk I can."

Saltpeter trotted into the Great Southern and caused Bell to whirl quickly by touching him on the shoulder. Bell had a gun drawn and cocked before he recognized the incompetent. With a growl he seized Saltpeter by the shoulder and shook him.

"How many times I've told you not to come up behind me like that," he snarled. "Don't you ever do it again. Understand?"

Saltpeter rubbed his shoulder, then expanded into his usual grin and produced the paper. It was in Spanish, but Bell knew that language. After reading it, he directed Saltpeter to find Max and send him to the private room where Doc Cranet was taking his siesta. Repairing to the room he aroused Cranet.

"I've received a message from Black Juan," he said. "He must have been in town all the time since Santo was killed."

Dandy Max bustled in and was told the same. Saltpeter found a bottle of whisky. Bell seated himself at the table and explained:

"Black Juan must have run across Pete somewhere. Listen to this:

> *"Señor Bell.*
>
> *"I am in command now; Santo is dead. I hold the secret. Your men have been looking for me. I do not like it. Now my men are watching. If I die you will never know where the gold is hidden. Shall we make a bargain?"*

"He's a damned liar!" exclaimed Dandy Max. "If he knew where it is he'd be pulling out with it."

"Not so easy to pack up and move that amount of gold without being seen," mused Cranet. "And there's lots of his breed in this town. They'd give him away for a drink."

Bell reflected moodily.

"Liar, or not," he said, "we must make a bargain with him. He may know. I'll send him a note."

He tossed off a drink and wrote rapidly. Giving it to Saltpeter, he directed:

"Take that back to the Mexican. If you stop on the way to pick up funny rocks I'll cut your ears off. *Sabe?"*

Saltpeter rubbed his ears and nodded his head rapidly. Then, in a whisper, he said:

"More will be killed. I saw them dead last night."

"You keep on dreaming that stuff and I'll cut your throat," warned Max.

"Don't be a superstitious fool, Max," sneered Bell. "Dreams will never kill you . . . Hop along with that bit of writing, Pete."

SALTPETER ran from the place, but slowed down once he was in the street. He was interested in a Government outfit of six covered wagons making for the plaza. He forgot his errand long enough to follow the dust covered outfit. He was curious enough to loiter while the stock were being watered and turned out to graze on the sorry grass. He even ventured to speak to the hard faced boss of the outfit, who carried his life in his hand each trip up and down the main road from the Rio to Fort Yuma. The boss did but little talking. When Saltpeter had finished and was thrusting his head into the back of a wagon the man caught him by the neck and roughly pulled him back.

The unfortunate glanced down at the wad of paper clinched in his hand and remembered his errand. He set off at a swift trot to the south side of the town, where Black Juan was waiting. He found the Mexican near the yuccas, and in an impatient state of mind. Snatching the paper Juan opened it, and read:

> *You stand in with us and we'll stand in with you. Come here to the Great Southern and we will talk it over. You cannot do anything without us. We need your help.*
>
> *Bell.*

Black Juan handed the paper to Saltpeter and motioned for him to read it. The halfwit grinned and turned the paper around and around, nodded his head and laughed loudly. Taking the paper back, Black Juan said in English:

"You say I come."

"I'll tell him. Come now."

Juan shook his head.

"You say I come," he repeated.

Saltpeter turned and ran to the town, but once he was among the squat, flat topped, one story houses he forgot his haste and turned into a narrow court at the back of the pesthouse. The court was empty, and without any hesitation the halfwit climbed nimbly to the flat roof, removed a wooden hatch and dropped down into the room. In one corner, behind a small pile of the rocks he had collected so assiduously, was a pile of blankets. At times he slept there. Digging under the blankets he worked out three big leather cases, such as were used in shipping black figs from Mexico. He rapidly examined these, one after another, and tied rawhide around them as a further security from meddlers. As his long fingers formed the stout knots he kept his head twisted so that he could watch the small window.

Finally Saltpeter was satisfied with his labor. With a spring he caught the edge of the square hole in the roof and nimbly drew himself through it and onto the roof. He remained flat on his face for a moment; then replaced the hatch and peered down into the court. Finding it empty, he dropped to the ground. His business as a messenger seemed to have been forgotten. Instead of hurrying to the Great Southern he wandered to the plaza and walked among the wagons, chuckling and staring, and often getting in the way. The wagon boss soon spied him and violently called out:

"Get out of here! Stay out . . . Bill, throw some empties into the light covered wagon. We'll fetch some water. This stuff from the wells is all alkali."

Saltpeter retreated hastily and wandered through the town, back to the court behind the pesthouse. Again he mounted the roof unnoticed and descended into the unsavory chamber. He was there when the wagon came along and halted by the window while the driver cursed his mules for becoming tangled up. He was out and off before the wagon resumed its way to the plaza with water splashing from the several barrels.

Now he was recalling his errand. He hastened back to the Great Southern and, stealing into the kitchen, began washing dishes. Bell found him there and cursed him roundly. Saltpeter listened, staring stupidly. Something in the street caught his attention. He pointed and cried:

"New men! Many men! In my sleep men were killed."

Bell gave one look at the gay cavalcade moving by the kitchen to a position before the open bar; then he was hurrying back to the gaming room. Dandy Max and Doc Cranet had been quick to sight the newcomers, who were Mexicans. They were a picturesque looking parcel of rascals. Their short jackets were laced with silver and decorated with gold braid. Silver discs tinkled from the rims of their huge hats. Each wore a sash of red, and the flaring trousers had insertions of silver cloth. There were some twenty of them, and as they halted before the saloon, quite filling the street, they faced in all directions and watched the housetops, as well as the people in the street.

BELL snatched up an apron from the bar and tied it around his waist. With both hands under the apron, and gripping two revolvers, he stepped to the door and stared into the dark face of Black Juan. The latter flashed his white teeth in a smile and said:

"Your man told you I was coming. Now I will talk."

"The fool told me nothing," said Bell. "But I'm glad you're here. Why do you come with so many men. The men here may get ugly. You should have come alone."

"They will not get ugly with Black Juan and his men. We are not afraid of all the *gringos* in Tucson," replied the outlaws' new leader. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder to indicate a small, white haired man who was perched like a monkey on a black stallion. "Behind me rides Old Miguel, who taught Murietta long ago in California. Beside him is José, who rode at the right hand of Claudio. Next comes the man who killed your Señor Jack Powers, when he fled to Mexico. Such men are not afraid of *gringo* sheep——"

He was interrupted by the third man crying:

"*Yo soy Enrique!* (I am Enrique!)"

Nodding proudly Juan went on:

"Their names are so many battle calls. Each man is picked, señor. They are not afraid of the Tucson rats. They followed Santo. No cowards rode with him. Now they follow me. I will come inside and drink mescal with you and have a talk. Tell your men to make no trouble with my men. My men know only one thing: to kill with gun or knife."

"A damned long palaver for so little said," grumbled Bell. "And please remember, señor, there are some here in Tucson, who fight with guns and knives, and who are not afraid. But come in. There will be no trouble unless your men start it. None of them will ride clear of the town if they start a fight. I can hold my friends in check if your men keep the peace."

"They will be quiet as lambs if left alone," assured Black Juan.

He swung from his horse and fingered the cord which held a small silver whistle suspended from his neck. Old Miguel caught his glance and nodded. Juan faced about and entered the long room and followed Bell into the private room. He halted for a moment on the threshold, as he beheld Max and Cranet at the table. Then he shrugged his shoulders and took a seat. He filled a glass with mescal and emptied it as he would so much water. Resting his arms on the table, his hands hanging down close to his guns, he announced:

"I come to trade."

Speaking in Spanish, and repeating it in English for the benefit of his two partners, Bell asked:

"What have you to trade?"

Darting his fierce gaze around the table Black Juan softly said:

"Your life and the lives of your two friends for the return of the gold which has been taken from the cache."

Bell exploded in terrible oaths. When he could control his temper he interpreted for his companions, and added:

"A dirty greaser trick!"

"He as much as says he's been to the spot where Santo hid the gold," said Cranet.

"Si, señor," quickly spoke up Black Juan to show he understood some English.

Bell's jaws tightened and he bored his gaze into the dark face and endeavored to guess the bandit's game.

"You talk like a crazy man." He spoke slowly. "How can you know where the stuff is? If you knew, you'd have taken it and returned to Sonora."

"I have found two cases. There were five," said Juan in a low voice, and his black eyes lighted with deadly fires.

"He's a damned liar!" cried Dandy Max.

Bell gestured for the gambler to keep quiet. He had an intuition that the man was not playing a part. Speaking rapidly he said:

"He isn't trying to run a bluff on us. There'd be no sense in it. Some skunk has stumbled upon it and taken part, or all of it. That's why he comes to us."

To Black Juan he said:

"If you'd found all you would not have come into Tucson. But do you really think we would have left any of it, if we had come upon it?"

Juan stared for a moment at the vulpine features of Doc Cranet, the avaricious face of Max, and into the reckless, predatory eyes of Gringo Bell, and found his former convictions weakening until they were less than suspicions. He struck his fist on the table.

"Who found the cache and took three out of five?" he hissed.

Saltpeter startled Bell by coming out of his corner to tell the four men:

"Dead men in the night. I saw them."

"Get out of here," Bell yelled at him in a burst of rage, "or I'll brain you!"

Cringing and backing away, his long arms raised as if to ward off blows, Saltpeter opened the door and darted from the room. Bell recovered a semblance of composure.

"Some scum here must have found the cache," he told the bandit chief. "He, or they, were scared away before they could finish the job. If any stuff is missing it is here in Tucson. If it is here, we will find it if we have to tear down every house. Call your men in from the street. The bar is free to them. This must be talked about."

Black Juan stepped to the door and blew twice on his whistle. Old Miguel came through the big room and up to his leader. Juan gave his orders, and Miguel returned to post a horse guard while the men entered and drank. Standing beside Black Juan, and resting a hand on his shoulder, Gringo Bell called out for all to hear:

"These men are my friends. Remember that. The bar is free to them."

THEN the four conspirators sat down at the table. The talk became general, Bell acting as interpreter. The latter discovered that his guest understood English better than he would have them know. The Americans urged that the gold be removed to a place of safety. Black Juan told them it had been shifted to another hiding place and was quite safe. He was urged to reveal the new hiding place as an evidence of faith in his new brothers. He smiled blandly and refused to do as asked until the missing gold was recovered. Bell's argument that he and his friends would never be content with three fifths of the treasure, had they had a chance to take all, had its weight with the bandit. He countered with the reminder that some thief had done that very inexplicable thing—taken part when he could have taken all.

"But he was scared away by your riding up the valley, or by someone coming down the valley from the town," reasoned Bell. Half believing he was being tricked, he added, "Send one of your own men to bring back a handful of the gold plates so that my friends may believe you know where it is hidden."

Black Juan considered this proposal for half a minute, then threw up his head and replied:

"Very good. But none of us will leave this room until he returns. No one but us and he shall know about this business. I will send my prince of fighters. Prince with lasso, knife, or gun."

He stepped to the door and the moment it opened every member of his band was facing him.

"Miguel!" he called.

Joaquin Murietta's right hand man came to the doorway.

"*Yo soy* Enrique!" jealously shouted the slayer of Jack Powers, the American bandit.

"And a very brave and gallant Enrique," cried Black Juan. "But I must have you here." He whispered briefly to Old Miguel, who bowed, went into the street and then mounted his black stallion and galloped away, his cloak whipping behind him.

Back at the table again Gringo Bell began an inquiry in which all were concerned: the alleged presence of Wolf Meagher in Tucson. For the first time during the interview, Black Juan displayed uneasiness.

"Señor Meagher must be in Sonora," he said.

"That's foolish talk, Black Juan. Santo sent word he was coming here. Santo was killed in the court back of this place. Only Meagher could have done it. He is here," said Bell. "We want to know what he looks like?"

"*Quien sabe!* He is nowhere. Then he swoops down. He is gone, and we buried a comrade. Some *Americano* killed Santo."

"That is not true, unless the American was Meagher," earnestly insisted Bell. "And none of my countrymen knew Santo was coming. He was bringing the secret we all wanted to learn. We would have defended him to the last man if we had had the chance. He was killed in the court while we three were inside, waiting for him to arrive. Who but Wolf Meagher could take a fight to Santo? Santo fired first and was shot through the heart and his slayer pushed him half through the little window in the big room."

Convinced against his will, Black Juan whispered:

"It is bad, my friends. Very bad. Our first work is to find him. If he is here, who sent him? The *Americano* was an old man. He came from the far north."

"Señor Grainger's people hired Meagher to look him up," said Bell. "It must be so. Santo made a mistake when he killed the old man."

"The old man started to fight. Like an old gray rat that is in a corner, he showed his teeth. He had to die. If we had known about Meagher, it might have been handled different. Meagher is the devil."

"What are you two talking about Meagher?" suspiciously asked Dandy Max.

"That he's a bad hombre. Señor Juan and I believe he must be found and rubbed out before we go ahead with anything else."

"Then let him turn his Mexicans loose to search the town."

Bell grinned sardonically.

"How will they go about it?" he asked. "Hold up every man and ask him if he's Wolf Meagher?"

"We know all the folks who stay here. Kill every strange man," said Max.

"That won't do. By this time Meagher may be disguised as a Mexican woman, or a friendly Apache, for all we know."

"I'm beginning to think there ain't any such cuss," said Max. "Every time one of the boys disappears and we learn he is in some prison, we set it down as Wolf Meagher's work. We're like a parcel of children, scaring ourselves by crying 'Boo!' If there is any Wolf Meagher he can be wiped out like any other human."

"That's true, but it's a man's job," said Bell. "It's all clear to me— as I've told Juan and you boys. Grainger was an educated old cuss. Highfaluting in his talk. Man of importance. His people got word to Fort Yuma. Meagher was put on the trail. Santo's the answer. There may be other answers."

Black Juan, catching bits of this talk, drank mescal and waited. After Max had again urged a close search for Meagher, Bell asked the Mexican if he would turn his men loose to comb the town. Juan promptly said:

"*Si.* If you will send twenty of your *Americano* friends along with them so there will be no fighting with the townspeople. If we do that, it would be well to offer ten thousand dollars for Señor Meagher's head."

"That would set the boys to killing every man they didn't know," said Bell.

He stared gloomily at the dingy wall. He was confronted by the old problem. Who of the hunters would know when he sighted the quarry? In desperation he told Black Juan:

"Meagher must have come up from Sonora close to your chief. The two must have arrived at the same time. They were in the court at the same moment. He could not have been suspected by Santo. Think! Try to remember any man south of the line whom you met and who was not one of you. Say someone pretending to be a prospector, or a man outside American law, like Jack Powers of the old days. A mule skinner, a hunter, anything."

Black Juan worried his brows, but all in vain. He shook his head and said:

"There was no one but people we have known and trusted for years. There was no one with us who was not one of us, before Santo came north alone."

Dandy Max gave the thought a different trend by irritably interrupting.

"All your talk is in a circle. Gets you nowhere. I'm more interested in that old coot who rode to fetch back some proof of the hidden gold. The cache must be a hell of a ways off to take so long for a man on a prime horse to be gone all this time."

Bell repeated this to Black Juan. Without a word the latter rose and stepped to the door.

"Enrique!" he called.

"*Yo soy* Enrique!" proudly shouted that individual. And he quit a monte game and swaggered up to his chief.

"Ride fast and learn why Old Miguel is gone so long," the leader ordered. Turning back to the three Americans he proudly explained, "That man loves killing above women, or gold."

A HALF hour passed before a galloping horse recklessly passed through the narrow streets and came to a halt before the Great Southern. The four in the private room sensed an unusual quiet in the gaming hall. Black Juan jumped to the door and opened it as Enrique was about to rap.

"Speak! What's the matter with you?" cried Black Juan. "You breathe hard, but your horse, not you, has been running."

Enrique, puffing from excitement, spoke briefly and mopped the sweat from his face. Black Juan staggered back and rested a hand on the table, his dark features reflecting amazement and a great fear. It was Bell who told Max and Cranet what Enrique had said.

"Hell's to pay!" he wrathfully began. "Miguel's dead. Killed by a knife. Dead with his knife in his fist and cloak wound around his left arm."

Cranet was the first to recover from the effect of the startling news. Smashing a fist on the table, he cried:

"A damned lie! A rotten game to cover up their stealing of the whole pot!"

"If they have the gold," Bell said angrily, "why should they bother with us? The old man was killed in a knife fight. Two men are bringing him in on his horse. That will be sound proof no one is playing a game on us."

"Señor Meagher!" gasped Black Juan.

"Yes," admitted Dandy Max. "We must believe that."

"We'll comb the town," decided Bell.

"You're ready to help, Don Juan?"

"We will do what we can," agreed the Sonoran, but there was no fire in his voice.

A babel of voices reached the small room. Bell stepped to the door to investigate. It was the arrival of Old Miguel, taking his last ride, dead from a knife thrust. While the big room emptied itself into the street one of Black Juan's men came to him and whispered a few words. The bandit chief's big black eyes widened and glared glassily. He leaned wearily against the wall and muttered inaudibly.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Bell.

"The last of the gold has been taken from the new cache! Miguel's killed! Someone must have trailed him there and struck when he was coming back."

CHAPTER III

YO SOY MEAGHER!

BLACK JUAN'S announcement came as a thunderclap. The fortune of three hundred thousand dollars had been whittled away until nothing was left. When Bell could conquer his wild rage he hurriedly gave orders to Doc Cranet and Dandy Max, and the three separated to pass among the excited and curious citizens and speak to a man here, and one there, being careful to select only those whose loyalty could be depended upon.

Returning to Black Juan, and speaking softly, Bell told him:

"From the first, you and Santo have had every chance. From the first you have spoiled everything. Your only chance to get back the gold is to join with us and search the town. I know the people better than you do, also the town. You must take orders from me till the stuff is found."

The Mexican bowed his head in acquiescence. Old Miguel's tragic fate rested heavily upon him. He addressed his followers and directed them to do as Señor Bell should order. Bell took complete charge and sent Cranet with a body of men to search the west side of the town, and he ordered Max to do similar work on the east side. He, himself, accompanied by Black Juan, would comb the south side. All forces were to converge and work to the north. He requested Black Juan to send two horsemen up the ninety mile desert road toward the Gila. These men, if the quarry were sighted, were instructed to take the thief alive unless it be known he had the gold with him. In the latter event the gold was to be buried with the man and one man was to remain on guard while the other brought the news to Tucson. If the thief was sighted, but at a distance, one man was to return with the news while the other was to follow.

"Send two horsemen at top speed down the Santa Cruz Valley," he continued. "They are not to attempt any search until they are well down the valley. Then they are to turn and work back toward the town. If our thief who kills is discovered, one rider is to return here as fast as horseflesh will bring him. The other is to keep watch on the thief. He must be careful not to be killed. Everyone begin work."

Now that Bell had recovered somewhat from the shock of Miguel's death and the loss of the gold he regained something of his usual optimism. The gold at least was out of the ground. It no longer was a Mexican secret. And it did not seem possible that even Wolf Meagher could have gotten beyond reach, provided he was taking the treasure with him.

"He'll never try to move it away from Tucson," Bell hurriedly told Black Juan. "It's here, somewhere in Tucson. Have the rest of your men split up and go with the different bands of searchers."

The combing process was at once commenced.

As Bell was leaving the Great Southern, Saltpeter ran to him and clawed at his arm, and shrilly warned:

"Men will be killed! I saw them killed while I slept!"

"Go back to washing dishes before you are killed," ordered Bell.

Saltpeter bobbed his head rapidly, but instead of obeying he wandered through the town, grinning and waving his arms as if finding much pleasure in the excitement. At times he walked with a peculiar shuffling step, his head bowed low so that his long hair fell over his face, and roughs hooted at him and dubbed him the "dancin' Injun".

Men with bloody records, who did not

belong to Bell's clan, stood on street corners, their belts bristling with weapons, and scowled truculently. But Bell was carrying no fight to them this night. On beholding such he loudly announced that a search was being made for a common foe; for one who struck secretly, and who was a stranger in Tucson.

A rare confusion was caused as the searchers began to enter the houses without the ceremony of knocking. With a drawn gun a bewhiskered ruffian would burst open the door of an dobe house and hurriedly tear hangings aside, kick over the poor furniture and scatter the bedding. Every box, or other receptacle, large enough to contain gold or a man, was roughly inspected. If a box, or a barrel, it was perforated with a bullet or two, and then examined. This procedure caused bitter wailing among the Mexican women. Their men offered no resistance, for their fear of Black Juan was great.

THE Mexican bandit was disturbed by the riotous uproar and insisted to Bell that the search should have been made with more secrecy.

"We've no time for sneak work," Bell told him. "You and Santo have tried your way and lost out at every turn of the card. We must learn in the shortest possible time if the man is here. Satisfied that he is not we must throw out a wide circle of horsemen to cut off his escape to the Gila, New Mexico, or Mexico. I'll uproot this damned place until satisfied the gold is, or isn't, here."

Shrugging his shoulders Black Juan asked:

"If we find it, how long can we keep it with every man in Tucson clawing at it? Hundreds of *gringos* are waiting for us to uncover it. Then a rush, fighting, dead men, and someone else will have it."

"Gringo Bell's my name. I'll handle the *gringos*," was the curt reply. "You look after your countrymen. You've mishandled this whole business as a game was never bungled before."

A shot from the pesthouse window threw dirt on the speaker's feet. With an animal howl Bell began emptying a gun through the narrow window. Then he was yelling:

"By God! We've nailed him! He's in the smallpox house!"

Black Juan noticed that the door was fastened with a chain. With a slow smile he said:

"Come back out of range. He is bottled up, *amigo*. But we must be careful."

Those in the street around them fled in panic. Black Juan pressed close to the wall of the house and edged along until he could thrust in a gun and fire down at the floor. Bell took his cue and duplicated the maneuver, standing on the opposite side of the window. The interior of the small room was criss-crossed by streams of lead, and was filled with acrid powder smoke. Volunteers began to venture forward and shoot through the opening. Bell gestured for these excited ones to desist. As the firing dropped he cried:

"There's nothing alive in there after that rain of lead. Some of you rip the chain clear and kick in the door. If alive, he can't get out."

The news traveled rapidly through the town that the prey had been run to earth; that he had taken refuge in the pesthouse; that he had the gold there, an immense amount of it. Before the chain could be removed the street was packed with excited humanity. All adjacent roofs were thickly covered.

"Be ready!" shouted Bell. The door swung inward and was checked by some obstacle.

With cocked gun in hand Bell pushed a Mexican aside and peered closely into the smoky apartment. His eyes dilated as he stared at the floor. He called to Black Juan:

"Man in there. On the floor. I can see his legs. His body holds the door from opening full width."

It was a clearer view of the man's legs that caused the Mexican to desist. The high heeled boots and big spurs, the flaring trousers, with insertions of silver cloth, were like his own. He wiped the nervous sweat from his forehead and told Bell:

"It is José Messea, one of my young men, one of the bravest!"

He could in all truth have added that Messea, despite his youth, was as promising a cutthroat as ever rode under a black banner.

Bell swore furiously and shouted:

"Great Southern men this way! Crooked work!" To Black Juan he added, "You'll explain how one of your own men could have done this without your knowledge."

The bandit chief was astounded for a few moments. Then he was angrily denying.

"He did not do it! He would never trick me. His older brother is one of my righthand men. And why is he on the floor, behind the door, if he isn't dead? If dead, who killed him? Stand back! Give us more room!"

Bell's adherents faced the excited mob and with a threatening display of weapons prevented a rush upon the house. Black Juan stood in the doorway and glared down at the big spurs. Outside the human pack was sounding its hunting call of:

"Gold! Gold! A room filled with gold."

"Yank him out and close that door," panted Bell. He wheeled to face the frenzied mob with his two guns raised shoulder high. The men in front shrieked in terror and begged him not to shoot. They insisted the pressure behind, and not their desire, was forcing them onward. Bell's men reached over the front row and tapped heads indiscriminately with the barrels of their heavy guns.

"I'm shooting at you back there if you don't stop this damned crowding," raged Bell. He flourished his weapons at the center of the crowd. There was a mighty heaving of shoulders and a determined effort to back away. Fifteen feet of space was gained. Ordering his men to commence firing into the heart of the mob if it pressed forward again, Bell turned to Black Juan and motioned for him to pass through the doorway. The bandit did so and stumbled over Saltpeter's collection of rocks. Recovering his balance he dragged the inanimate figure from behind the door and through the doorway.

"They've found a dead man. They've found a dead greaser!" yelled an onlooker.

Again there began an irresistible advance, which was only checked by Bell's heavy guns aiming at the center of the crowd. He began to count:

"One . . . two . . ."

None waited for the fatal three to be spoken. Like a spent wave the dense throng drew back again.

Without turning his head Bell barked: "Is it there?"

"Nothing but worthless rocks. But look here, *amigo.*"

Bell half turned and darted a glance at the dead man. José Messea was dead, but his two guns were fully loaded. He had died from a knife thrust, even as Old Miguel had died. The dead right hand was convulsively clutching a bowie knife. Obviously he had not been taken by surprise, but had endeavored to make a fight.

Black Juan continued, saying:

"Young Messea! With the heart of a lion! A master with the knife. And he's dead." He whistled and two of his men worked through the press to his side. He ordered them to pick up the dead man and to carry him away. Then turning on Bell, his dark face filled with rage, he asked:

"Has my friend anything to tell about this?"

Bell licked his dry lips and glanced around apprehensively.

"Meagher!" he whispered. "It was Meagher who fired the shot from the window. He did it to hold us here, forcing this door, while he escaped."

"Someone fired a shot into the dirt at our feet. But when and why did my brave Messea enter this place? Did he follow someone there? How did he get in there? Through the window, of course. But why was he not seen going through the window?"

"Devil answer if he can. I can't," said Bell. "Your man got inside. He found someone who drew a knife. They fought. You and I will go inside."

BY THIS time enough of the Mexican and American desperadoes had arrived to form a cordon around the end of the house. The two leaders entered the room. With his foot Bell moved some of the rock rubbish about. Then he thrust his head through the window and noted the angle of the shot which had struck close to his feet. He was greatly puzzled. He was sure no one had stood at the window in firing the shot. Yet the angle was so sharp that a man must have stood at the window, or be high on the wall. The latter was an impossibility. He called Black Juan's attention to the mystery. The Mexican sighted along his finger, and then glanced behind him. The room was low, in common with all Tucson houses. Juan swept his gaze to the ceiling, and his eyes lighted with discovery. He touched Bell's arm and pointed to the square hole, covered by a hatch. Stepping on the rock pile he reached up a gun and pushed the hatch to one side. With a spring he caught the edge of the opening and easily drew himself halfway through the hole.

He hung thus, supported by his elbows, and glanced about. Then he exclaimed sharply and dropped back to the floor. Bell demanded an explanation. Juan held out his open palm.

"It was there on the roof!" he cried.

Bell stared dully at the small plate of almost pure gold. When he could recover his wits he suspiciously said:

"Sure you didn't take it from your pockets."

"With my pockets in this room, and my head, shoulders and arms out of the room?" jeered Black Juan. "Have you lost your wits? Who are we hunting? Who has stolen the gold? Who fired the shot through the window to make us halt and collect all the people here while he got away? Who, first of all, killed my poor friend, who saw him enter here and followed him? Meagher. He leaned down through that hole, after killing brave Messea, and fired through the window into the dirt. Then he covered the opening and dropped down into that court. Everyone was crazy about the gold in this place. Even now he may be on the edge of the crowd, laughing at us."

"You're right," whispered Bell. And the sweat he wiped from his face was not entirely caused by the heat. "Let's get out of here. If this keeps up I'll believe he's the Devil himself, and no human man."

"I said he was the Devil," muttered Black Juan. "No man could have killed Santo, after letting him have the first shot." He stepped back and took hold of the door to close it. Bell crossed the threshold, but the Mexican paused to glance behind the door, now that the light was streaming down through the open hatch and flooding the dirt floor. Bell wheeled on hearing the low exclamation and stepped back and closed the door. Black Juan stooped and picked a second plate of gold. Bell gaped in amazement and told Juan:

"It doesn't make sense. The treasure never was here. You people hid it in a different place down the valley. Meagher found it and removed it, but he never fetched it into Tucson and placed it in this pesthouse."

"Open the door. The people mustn't know what we found. They would be storming the place. The town is so excited we can do no more hunting. I will keep my horsemen circling the town. We will go back and drink and try to think."

Bell threw the door open and left it thus so that all Tucson might enter at will.

"There is nothing here but some worthless rock," he told the curious mob. "Remember that people died in there of smallpox."

After he started for his place of business and Black Juan was sending more horsemen to the outskirts, the rough citizenry crowded into the loathsome place, lured by their lust for gold. Not until a dozen had entered and had emerged empty handed did reason return to the populace. A touch of comedy was given the scene by the sudden arrival of Saltpeter. Like a madman he elbowed his way through the crowd and seized the door and shut it, and stood before it, his arms outstretched to bar further entrance. The disheveled hair and rolling eyes, the long, thin face, and flapping cast off garments, evoked shouts of laughter. Panting heavily, the halfwit placed the chain over the staple and drove in a wedge of iron. Then he passed around to the window and peered in. His gradual return to complacence after these maneuvers caused more mirth and merriment, and much rough badinage. It provided a grotesque anticlimax to the treasure hunt, and served to relax the general tension.

Ignoring the jeering queries he trotted away to the plaza. Again he became curious as to the contents of the Government wagons and would have crawled into one, if the wagon boss had not caught him by the shoulder and violently yanked him back. Not satisfied with that, the boss led him to the edge of the plaza and talked vehemently. But Saltpeter was used to kicks and cuffs. Once he realized the plaza was closed to him he trotted off into the mesquite and did not pause until he came to the brush shelter of a friendly Apache. Here was a man who treated him with all honor. He brought out an olla of water and some dried figs and the two talked with few words and many signs.

When Saltpeter returned to the town the streets were back to normal. All the resorts were wide open for a lively night. Black Juan's men were free with their money. Guitars and fiddles made the evening hideous. Drunken men stumbled about in the dust and filth, fell over broken bake ovens, and dragged themselves into broken corrals to sleep until the hot southern sun should arouse them to a day of misery.

THE Great Southern was doing a capacity business, as Black Juan and his men were quartered there and were plentifully supplied with gold. Their presence attracted gamblers from other resorts. Saltpeter entered the crowded room and began his usual round of the tables. The Mexicans were not used to his inquisitiveness, and they glared hotly when he picked up gold coins, or chips, and examined them curiously. Cranet cursed him for bringing bad luck. Bell, already irritated to the point of murder, came up behind him and struck him a tremendous blow on the side of the head and sent him sprawling to the floor.

"Go and wash dishes, or I'll kill you!" he thundered.

Saltpeter, remaining on all fours, shrilly cried:

"Men will be killed. I shall see them killed while I sleep."

Bell menaced him. His anger became homicidal again when those at the nearby tables laughed at the halfwit's grotesque behavior. Instead of making for the cookroom he crawled among the tables. Bell strode after him, endeavoring to kick him. Black Juan, playing monte, glanced down at the groveling creature and said to Bell:

"You have not trained your men as I have trained mine."

"That isn't a man," growled Bell. He drew back his foot, thinking he had his victim cornered. "You see men killed when you sleep, eh? Maybe you'll see one killed while you're awake."

With a shrill scream Saltpeter crawled under the table, and in doing so, upset Black Juan. As the Mexican bandit crashed to the floor his short jacket flapped open and a dozen small gold bars cascaded to the floor.

Bell stared dumbfounded. Black Juan came to his knees and glared wildly at the golden bars. Bell gripped him by the shoulder as if assisting him to get on his feet. But the grip bit deep into the muscles as, lowering his head, he murmured:

"I want to talk with you in my room, señor. If one of your men makes a move, you die! . . . Cranet, pick up this small change our friend has dropped, and bring it to my room."

The Mexicans were scattered among the different tables. Only a few saw what had happened, and suspected Bell was doing no more than assist a man to his feet. Perhaps one was uneasy, for he cried, "*Yo soy* Enrique!" and rose from his chair several tables away. He beheld his leader standing beside the American. He saw the two walk away, arm in arm. Don Juan was wearing his silver whistle. One arm was free. If anything were irregular he could give the signal for his men to rally. With a grunt Enrique dropped back on his stool and played the top layout to win. Dandy Max knew nothing of what had occurred, yet he knew something was amiss. As Bell passed his table he lifted his brows questioningly.

"See that no one disturbs us," said Bell.

Cranet had the gold concealed under his coat as he followed his leader.

Without exchanging a word the three men entered the private room. Bell pointed to a chair and told the Mexican to be seated. Then he reached forward and plucked the gun and knife from the red sash, murmuring:

"Too hot to wear weapons . . . Cranet, put that stuff on the table and stand by the door to keep everyone out."

"That means Max as well as the others?"

"I said everyone . . . Black Juan, where did you get this gold?"

"*Dios sabe!*" He appeared to be completely cowered. He had no fear of Bell, but he was sensing the supernatural in the inexplicable appearance of the gold. "Santo killed him," he said in a low voice and without lifting his gaze from the table. "He was an old man; but Santo always killed." It was a soliloquy. "It is black magic."

"Where did you get this Aztec gold?" harshly demanded Bell. He gripped the edge of the table with both hands, and leaned forward, his eyes lurid with suspicion and anger.

Black Juan slowly threw back his short jacket and replied:

"I have no place to carry it. It is heavy. I was knocked to the floor. It fell on the floor. It is heavy. It was not in my clothes when I sat down. Where did it come from? It is devil magic."

"It came out of your clothes when that idiot knocked you to the floor. There was one of your men dead in the pesthouse. Two pieces, like these, were found there."

"Señor Bell, I am not afraid of your big guns, nor your big hands. I am afraid of the unknown," the Mexican replied. His bearing was returning to dignity. "I am asking myself if the dead came back to place a curse upon me. I am asking myself if a man can be haunted by ghost gold."

Bell laughed grimly.

"That was no ghost gold, my friend. The whole business has been very queer. You have lost all the gold, and yet you have these bars. I'm wondering where the rest of it is. What trick are you playing on me?"

"The same trick Old Miguel played when he rode out and got himself killed by someone's knife. Old Miguel was a prince with a knife. He had it gripped in his hand. He had had a chance to defend himself. Yet he was killed. I am tricking you, señor, just as young Messea did, when he got himself killed in the pesthouse." Black Juan spoke with great bitterness. As Bell pondered over his words, he added, "How their ghosts must be laughing to think how they fooled the *gringo!*"

"Gold turns up when you and your friends make a move," doggedly insisted Bell. Yet he was uneasy in his mind when he recalled the two Mexicans so mysteriously killed.

"I reckon you're on the wrong trail, Bell," spoke up Doc Cranet from the door. "If the greasers have the gold, why are they sticking around Tucson? Why ain't they riding south to the Sonora line. This gold on the floor just happened. How the devil it happened I can't say. But it would be just as reasonable to say that poor simpleton collecting worthless rocks is connected with it as to think Don Juan knows anything about it. Saltpeter was crawling on the floor when the gold appeared. That pesthouse is his storeroom for rubbish. A bar was found there. Where could Don Juan carry the gold on his person? It had to be in a pocket. What pockets has he in his jacket?"

BELL'S eyes flickered. He leaned across the table and threw back the lapels of the short jacket. The garment contained no inside pockets. He gestured for Juan to stand. The latter obeyed and removed his jacket and tossed it on the table. Bell ignored it and examined the man's shirt and broad sash. Walking around the table he studied the man's trousers, tight over the hips and flaring at the ankles.

Slumping into his chair he growled:

"I am stumped. Take your gun and knife. It's too damned mysterious for me to think out."

"Don Santo's death was mysterious. It's never been thought out. Nor old Miguel's. Nor young Messea's," said Black Juan. "It all happens because the old man was killed. He was very old. His hair was white. He was not strong. There was no need to kill him. Santo was a fool. Now I'm beginning to be afraid. Who killed Santo? *¿Quien sabe?* Who found and removed most of the gold from the first cache? Who found the new cache and removed the gold? Who killed Messea? Who fired the plunging shot from the little house, which made us stop and stay there, searching? How does this gold come on the floor when I lose my balance and fall over?"

"He talks straight, chief," spoke up Cranet. "There's some big game neither he, nor you, have tumbled to. Max thinks the same. Something mighty queer is going on in Tucson these days."

"Shut up! I want to think." Bell bowed his head in his hands and concentrated on each unusual, unexplained event, beginning with the death of Santo in the court. At last he lifted his head, his face bleak with doubt and fear. To Black Juan he said:

"Pick up your weapons . . . Cranet, fetch Saltpeter."

"The crazy one," murmured Black Juan.

Bell made no reply. He helped himself to a big drink of whisky and tapped his fingers on the table and kept his gaze fixed on the door. When he heard steps he amazed the Mexican by pulling a gun and dropping it in his lap. The door opened and Cranet, alone, entered.

"The idiot is off, mooning around somewheres," he reported.

"Tell Max to take several of the boys and round him up and fetch him here."

"Do you want me here any longer?" asked the Mexican.

"No. But stay in the big room and be ready?"

"Be ready for what?"

"That I don't know, but it will be something big, I'm thinking."

Black Juan passed out with Cranet and returned to the tables. The Mexican spoke to two of his men, who left the saloon shortly after Max and several desperadoes departed on their hunt for the halfwit. After an hour of futile searching Max and his helpers returned. As they were entering the Great Southern they noticed two horsemen at the head of an intersecting street. Max glanced at them sharply and remarked:

"The Mexicans are riding somewhere."

But after he had entered the big room the Mexicans came to the front of the building, bringing all the horses with them. A shrill whistle was the signal for Black Juan to rise from his game and run to the door. From their various positions in the big room the other Sonoran bandits ran to the street and leaped into the saddle. Bell burst from his private room and ran to the door, and cried:

"What are you doing, Don Juan? There's a man to be found. He knows what we would know. Dismount."

"Enrique!" shouted Black Juan.

"*Yo soy* Enrique!" shouted the killer.

"There is your man!" And with a theatrical gesture Black Juan pointed to Gringo Bell.

The latter was a second slow to suspect danger. He was outside the door, and, as if bewildered, he paused a fatal moment to gape at Black Juan before beginning his retreat. Cranet screamed a warning and pulled a gun just as Enrique hurled his heavy knife. The streaking blade caught Bell in the neck, and as the American clawed at his throat and sank to his knees, dying, Cranet fired and killed a mounted man, but not Enrique. He was promptly shot down in turn by Black Juan.

Pandemonium raged inside the big room as the men endeavored to escape from the building without using the main entrance. Pistols crackled along the column, the Mexicans shooting over the sidewalk bar at the milling throng inside. Dandy Max, staggering from a mortal wound, gained the doorway and leaned against the jamb and shot two Mexicans before he succumbed.

"Kill all the *gringos! Yo soy* Enrique!" came the well known battle cry.

In the great confusion none had eyes for the flat roof, and none saw that grotesque face peering down. None sensed his presence until he dropped and knocked a Mexican from the saddle and mounted the prancing animal. He first attracted general attention when he wheeled the horse about and spurred up the street which led to the old stage road across the ninety mile desert. Bullets whistled by him, but his appearance and sudden theft of the horse befuddled the Mexicans for a bit. Black Juan was the first to react. Leaping his horse away from the front of the saloon, he whistled shrilly for his men to follow him.

The saloon erupted and the night was filled with hideous threats. The citizens were amazed to find the Mexicans had ridden north.

"It's a game!" shouted a new leader. "They'll swing to the south. Into the mesquite to head 'em off!"

MEANWHILE the pursuit was taking orderly form. Far ahead in the moonlight rode the hunted. In a pounding string the Mexicans gave chase. Enrique, shouting his name, left his position in the line and rapidly took the lead. Black Juan rode next and after him came Messea's brother. The three, riding close, drew away from the main body. At intervals Black Juan sounded his whistle for those behind to increase their pace.

Enrique, only knowing men had been killed and another was to be caught and exterminated, allowed his chief range alongside so that he might shout.

"What does it all mean? Why did you tell me to kill the *gringo*?"

"He cheated us from the start. He dared to place hands on me," snarled Black Juan.

"What man are we chasing now?"

"The man who stole our gold. Can you see him?"

Enrique pointed to a bobbing dot under a full, white moon. He cried:

"We will catch him and burn the truth out of him. Faster! faster! Give me orders to go ahead and use my lasso."

"Ride your best, Enrique! Take him alive if you can. He is worth much gold alive."

Enrique's horse forged ahead. The fugitive glanced back occasionally to observe how the pursuit was faring. At last he discovered that one man rode well ahead of his mates. Several miles from town, Enrique had greatly increased his lead and was cutting down the distance between him and his quarry. The fugitive spurred his mount into the mesquite dotted wasteland. Almost at the same moment the pursuer's big stallion did likewise and raced along a parallel course. Enrique shouted in triumph as he rapidly drew abreast of his man and took a short diagonal to come up with him, that failing, to drive him back into the road. Then he was reining in as he beheld a motionless figure ahead. The man was actually waiting for him. Enrique dropped the coiled lasso over the horn and drew a gun. What was gold after all? The band took much gold. Here was one worth killing, and the old lust to slay filled the bandit's veins with fire. A clump of greasewood was between him and his victim. He bent low and walked his horse close to the greasewood. Then he drove home the spurs and was streaking around it, screaming:

"*Yo soy* Enrique!"

From the motionless horsemen came a mighty voice, announcing:

"*Yo soy* Wolf Meagher!"

Enrique felt a strange chill, yet his heart was ever high. Furiously spurring his half mad mount, he commenced firing. The arm of Meagher rose and fell and Enrique swayed heavily.

"*Yo soy*——"

But the rest was choked by a bubbling cry, and the big stallion bolted on to the west, leaving his dead master stretched on the gravelly soil.

The main body of the bandits kept to the road. Black Juan shrewdly anticipated Meagher's return to the highway. Scouts, sent out to learn how Enrique was faring, came upon the stark figure and after identifying it turned and raced madly to report to their chief. Meagher's mount was a lather of foam and the rider spurred him no longer, for he knew the chase might be a long one, extending even to the big bend of the Gila. He, too, yearned for the road, but not until his steed had recovered his wind. So he kept to the wasteland, keeping within half a mile of the road. Toward morning he halted and allowed his horse to rest. He fancied he could hear Black Juan's whistle and the faint cries of men scouting to locate him. In the early dawn none would have recognized him as Saltpeter, the halfwit. The long hair was brushed back from the thin face. The vacuous expression of the eyes had vanished, and the thin lips were tightly drawn and no longer flabby.

WHEN the rose light was creeping above the Santa Catalina range, Meagher examined his two guns, mounted and rode on a long diagonal toward the road. The Mexicans had sent scouts far up the road and, like Meagher, had allowed their animals to rest until daylight. Smoke from a morning fire told him the location of their camp. Dismounting and leading his horse, he worked closer to the highway, keeping behind a screen of scrubby, ragged growth. Finally he reached a position where he could see the road was clear for a quarter of a mile to the south. He mounted and entered the road, lifting his horse into a gallop.

Inside of a few minutes the discovery howl was raised. Meagher held on, watching sharply for the advance scouts. Pistols were fired far down the road. He knew this was done to warn the scouts he was coming. He came to a waterhole and dismounted, allowing his horse to drink a bit. When he took to the saddle he had to fight his horse to make him leave the water. Down the road appeared a horseman. The chase was on again. He held his horse to a leisurely gait as he watched for more of the enemy to appear. Finally they began stringing into view. The man in the lead was spurring and quirting his horse in a furious effort to overtake the

Border sleuth. Meagher knew it must be Black Juan.

But this time Wolf Meagher was not running away. Far up the road were two dots coming to meet him. These would be the scouts sent ahead during the night. He waited calmly until Black Juan was within long range of a .45, and faced about. The bandit leader commenced firing.

With a last glance to estimate the distance of the scouts returning from the north, Meagher spurred his horse on to meet Black Juan. The latter promptly quit the road and was lost to view in the mesquite. But Meagher knew his game and watched the straggling growth sharply. He stood in his stirrups and detected motion a short distance from the road. Men down the road were riding at top speed, the scouts, returning from the north, were proceeding more cautiously. Settling himself in the saddle Meagher rode out to find Black Juan. They met unexpectedly in an opening.

Screaming with rage, Black Juan charged recklessly, shooting as he came. Going over the side of his horse like an Apache, Meagher raced to meet him. They passed each other at a distance of fifty feet. Black Juan fired and wounded the stallion. Meagher fired twice, rapidly, and Black Juan fell from the saddle and was dragged by his horse back to the road. Meagher dismounted and examined his horse. The bullet had not touched a bone. Mounting, he soon was back in the road, which was clear of the men from the south. All had followed their leader's example and had taken to the wasteland. The two men up the road were to be reckoned with, however. Meagher charged them, firing rapidly and with deadly skill. He hit a horse, and the rider ran into the mesquite. The second man yelled defiance and came on and was shot out of his saddle. With a clear road before him the Border sleuth proceeded leisurely on his way.

HE SAW no signs of further pursuit, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that the band was broken up. At El Pecacho, forty-five miles from Tucson, he met an outfit bound for Tucson. He warned them of the Mexicans down the road and in return received food for himself and feed and water for his horse. A few hours of night travel brought him to the Blue Water Wells, where he found the Government outfit in camp. The hard faced wagon boss grinned broadly on beholding him. He said:

"Knew you'd fetch through, or I'd never quit down there 'n' left you behind. Now you can look into all the wagons without being manhandled. Lawd! how it fooled 'em. How's luck?"

"A running fight. Enrique and Black Juan and one or two others have passed out. Bell and Cranet were dead when I made a jump for it. Max must have met the same finish. The Apache brought in what was left of that stuff?"

"It's in the wagon with the rest. I've nearly laughed my head off every time I think of your cute trick about gittin' the stuff out of that pesthouse without any one guessing the truth. Wagon blocked the view of the winder, an' there was you inside passing the stuff out right into the wagon where it was hid by the water barrels."

"One man found me there. We fought with knives. That was my most uneasy time in Tucson. But if all the scum in Tucson and Sonora were wiped out it wouldn't make up for poor old Grainger. Knew his folks up north. They were good to me when I was a kid. On your return trip I want you to bring down and deliver to that friendly Apache a parcel of presents I'm sending him. I never could have got the stuff if he hadn't spied on Santo right after he killed Grainger.

"You'll get a fine present for lending a hand," Wolf Meagher concluded.

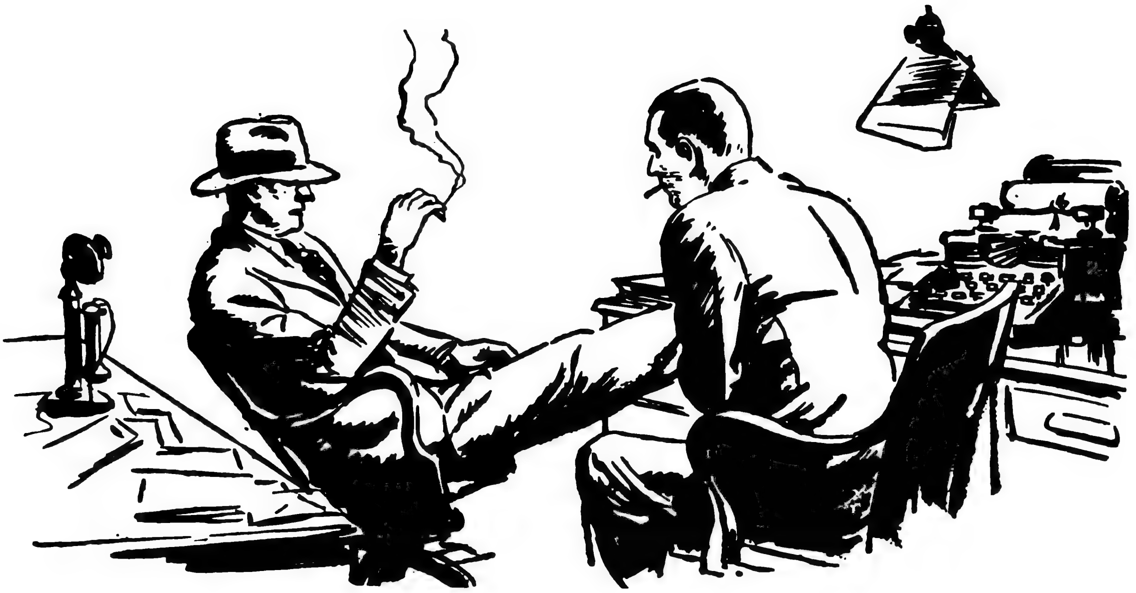
"I had orders to do it. Done it anyway, of course, to help Wolf Meagher. But I was under orders. I reckon I don't want any of it. There's kids up north who will need it."

"And the old folks were kind to me when I was kid. I am taking nothing, but there will be a greaty plenty after you have been paid, and the Apache is taken care of. I had my pay in playing the fool and deceiving Gringo Bell."

"And wiping out quite a number of the cutthroats."

Wolf Meagher's thin lips twisted in a reminiscent smile, but his eyes were gray flints as he bowed his head, and said:

"Yes, I was well paid. Quite a number. A goodly number. *Yo soy* Meagher!"



WANTED—A TITLE

A Tense, Short Tale of the City News Men

By EDWARD ERD WALLIS

THE newsroom had taken on an air of somnolence. It was a complete and sudden letdown from the bustle and buzz of the preceding hours with their rat-a-tat of typewriters, bawling of orders and calls of "copy!", telephones ringing incessantly, everything that goes into the making of an edition. Except for a report or two from district men checking up on evening paper stories, all the stuff was in, or practically so, for the "bulldog." It was one of those occasional lulls just before deadline when almost anything, or nothing at all, might happen.

Those of us who were not out on assignments were lolling about doing nothing in particular. Three or four of the boys were off in a corner with their heads together over a dictionary. Carlson, the cub, was up front having a worrisome time with the city editor. Behind me Alan Hurst, the city's best rewrite man, sat slouched in his chair, his feet up on the back of mine. His face was tilted ceilingward and his eyes were closed. A lazy curl of cigaret smoke climbed from between listless fingers.

"Say, loafer," I turned and addressed him. "Why don't you do your sleeping at home? And steer those hoofs from my clean collar. It's got to last till Sunday."

"I ain't sleepin', old dear," he said, neither moving nor opening his eyes. "I'm on the tail of an idea. Got a short story due first thing in the morning and not a hootin' peep from the Muse.

"If you ever start fictionizing, watch out for contracts. They'll burn you up. Too damn restrictive, I mean. The *Modern Tales* bunch got me tied up for one a month, no misses. Thank God this is my last. So as you're no help, kindly button your nose, kid, and run along."

That I did. Carlson had returned to his desk and I wandered over to chat with him when one of the phones set up a peremptory jangling. Resnick, one of the deskmen, took the call. Tension. Suspense. We all stood waiting, sensing something big, while Resnick listened. Suddenly he slewed around in his chair.

"Come on, you lazy bums," he yelled. "Gang war's busted loose again. It's Haggerty from Fourth and Broad. You, Alan, come off the horizontal an' take him in Number One Booth. Lord! Seven minutes. Someone call composing."

Alan was in the booth about a minute.

He came out smiling and dropped behind the nearest desk.

"What is it?" asked the chief.

"Nobody hit, was there?" Resnick added.

Alan was hammering away at a machine.

"Not so hot," he called. "Gangdom's poorest marksman. Total damage: one plate glass window, a busted ketchup bottle behind it and a bunch of scared cops up an alley."

"Make that your lead," directed the chief, "an' keep writin'. Five minutes. How was that? Gangdom's poorest marksman? There's a head for you, Resnick. Make it a streamer."

His eyes fell on me.

"You," he called. "Get down and give Haggerty a lift."

I found Haggerty at the Fifth District Stationhouse.

"They ain't nothin' more to do," he said. "It's all washed up. The cops don't know nothin'."

"As usual," I remarked.

"Yeah. They was hell a-poppin' for a minute, though. A guy that sees it tells me there was just the two of them runnin' down opposite sides of the street. They was only one doin' all the shootin'. The other was too busy duckin' and draggin' dirt. Want to see the busted window?"

ON OUR way around we picked up a copy of the bulldog, still damp and sticky. Across the top of the front page in black, blatant type they had stuck the head:

GANGDOM'S POOREST MARKSMAN!

Alan had managed to get through a half column. It was good masterly stuff in spite of the hurry. He made a big joke of the affair, laughed at the police and kidded the gang whose member with a gun full of bullets could do no better than draw mock blood from a ketchup bottle.

"Hurst's all wet on that poor marksmanship stuff," Haggerty remarked. "I told him who I thought it was. Damned if I'd want him shootin' at me inside of a half mile circle. It was just a break that's all. A lucky break for the other fellow."

"Is there a lowdown on it?" I asked.

"Sure there is, but I don't know how straight it is. I get it from the lieut, see? And he gets it from a stoolie—I don't know who—that Sky High Gerber—you know him, one tough baby, ain't he?—that he's out to head the Blackie Gang since the Old Man got bumped off. See? They's another guy, either it's Bat Ear or the Parson, that's after it too, see? It was one of them Sky High was tryin' to get. You got to make allowances, though. That's a hell of a dark street there. An' they were runnin', too, an' besides, none of them ain't had much practice lately."

We talked a little longer. Then I left Haggerty and went back to the police station to await further possible developments. But as Haggerty said, it was all washed up, and when I got back to the office they were finishing work on the last edition. It lacked fifteen minutes to quitting time. Alan was back again in the identical position that he had been in before the excitement, although, now, there was a smile on his face and his lips were moving.

Presently he straightened up in his chair and looked around the room, saw me and beckoned to me to come over.

"In a hurry to get home?" he asked.

"Not especially," I answered, though I was. I had been up all day and was tired.

"Well, listen. I've got a pip of a story idea here. I'm going to stick all night, if I have to, to get it out. Funny how you'll get all stewed up over a thing like this and then—bang! You get an idea from nowhere, like that.

"I've got everything but the title. I've always been lousy on titles. It's got to be a tricky one. You're good on that sort of stuff. Gimme a lift and I'll buy your dinners for a week. What do you say?"

"You flatter me, O. Henry," I said. "Let's have the story."

Alan slumped back, hooked his thumbs into the armholes of his vest and began fingering his watch chain. His eyes were closed again.

"You know that line we sprung tonight," he began, "about gangdom's poorest marksman. That's the whole point of the thing. That and Haggerty's lowdown. Here's the way it goes:

"Take an underworld type, like Sky High for instance, and give him a mania for publicity. Clips everything he can find in the papers about himself. Keeps a scrapbook and all that. One sheet runs a stick or two about him being a crook and he's flattered. Another rag calls him dangerous and he's tickled to death. Anonymous stuff, you see. But when his name does appear, like when he's pinched on suspicion or something like that, why, he gets the kick of his life. Everything he does is by and for publicity. He's a hound for it. Because of it he climbs right on up through the gang. Do you get it?"

I nodded.

"All right. Then let's say that this Sky High and another, the Parson, are about on equal terms next to the Old Man in authority. The Old Man is bumped off and the papers take it to mean that someone in a rival gang did it. But Sky High clips the story. See? It's the biggest lineage he had ever gotten."

Alan stopped for a moment and meditated.

"There's got to be a girl in it. A kind of a headstrong wench. It's a toss-up between Sky High and the Parson as to who'd get her. She's a vacillating type. Leans a bit to the Parson until after the Old Man's gone, when Sky High starts in to make her for himself. Of course, she knows all about his wen for publicity, his scrapbook and so forth. And she discovers the clipping about the killing of the Old Man.

" 'You'll go for a ride,' she says, 'if they find this out. Do you know it?'

" 'What do mean? Ride?' asks Sky High. 'Who's goin' to do it?'

" 'The Parson wouldn't mind.'

" 'And you'll go for a ride first, for squealin'.'

"Of course you know she wouldn't squeal. But Sky High figures the best way to get the girl definitely for himself, get the Old Man's job and clean the whole matter up is to start his campaign against the Parson at once.

"How does it sound so far?"

"Good. Fine," I said, and I meant it.

"They go for a walk and when they pass a restaurant where he knows the Parson is he sends her in for him. She wants to know what for and why he doesn't go in himself.

" 'Nothin' like that,' he says. 'I'm makin' up a laugh for the papers. Send him out and keep out of the way.'

"When she goes in he crosses the street. Presently the Parson comes out and looks around for Sky High, expecting to find him in front of the doorway. And as he does, Sky High lets one go that skims his arm, goes through the window and knocks the head off a ketchup bottle. Like tonight, do you see?

"The Parson digs for his gun but brings his hand back empty. He starts on a run with Sky High following and whanging away all around him. The girl has taken it all in from the doorway. When they get together later she wants to know how come?

" 'That's to show you the kind of a torpedo you're playin' around with,' Sky High explains to her. 'He figgered he was goin' to get it. Why didn't he stand and take it? Why? Yellow, that's why. No guts.'

" 'Anyway, I'll say you're a lousy shot,' she answers. 'You're lucky you didn't get plugged. Say, by the way, why didn't he shoot back?'

" 'Don't you see? I wasn't tryin' to get him—this time. Didn't I tell you I was goin' to make a laugh for the papers? Wait'll you see the story they give me:

NOTORIOUS GANGSTER RUNS

AWAY!

AFRAID TO STAND AND TAKE IT!

" 'As for him not shootin' back, use your head. You don't think I'd have missed if I didn't know he wasn't heeled, do you? Dobie and Dip lifted his gat while he was eatin'.'

"Here I'll have to work in some heavy amorous stuff, I guess. Show that the girl has been for him all the time, just waiting for a showdown."

ALAN paused a moment while we called good night to a couple of the boys. Work was done and they were beginning to dribble out.

"Now here's the main point of the story," he continued again. "Get it. Sky High is naturally all pepped up, waiting for the papers. He gets them and discovers that the biggest rag in town, the one that has been giving him the best breaks, has turned the joke against him. Bold type:

GANGDOM'S POOREST MARKSMAN!

"Here he's been thriving on the congratulatory stuff and heroic hooey for so long. And then they come along and get the wrong angle, misunderstand his motives, as it were, and, to his way of thinking, leave him wide open to ridicule. Can't you imagine his reaction?"

"Why, he'd most likely go and pump his initials on the Parson's shirt front," I hazarded, "just to show he could do it."

"Maybe he would," Alan said with a noncommittal smile.

"Is that the way you're going to end it," I asked.

"No. That's too obvious." Alan was slipping his first sheet into the typewriter. "I've got a better one than that. And that's all I'm going to tell you. You won't need to know it because you'd probably build a title on it and spoil the whole damn thing. If you want to see how it winds up, get a copy of next month's *Modern Tales.*"

Carlson, one of the last to leave, stopped by me just then to borrow a cigaret and some change for supper or breakfast or whatever it is a newspaper man eats at that time of the morning. I watched him pass down the room and through the door at the end into the waiting room, known in newsroom parlance as "the gate." Alan was thumping away with noisy concentration. I was settling myself for some serious thought when Carlson returned. He walked over to Alan.

"Hurst, there's a jane to see you at the gate."

"Aw, hell! What did you want to tell her I was here for? Is it that blonde? Do I know her?"

"No, you horse's neck, she's a high yellow with a blue beard. How do I know who you know?"

Alan jumped from his chair and hurried down the aisle as if to make quick dispatch of the matter.

"I'm not dating anything tonight," he said.

"Hey, listen!" Carlson called after him. "It's nothing like that. She says she has something hot on that shooting."

Alan stopped, thought a second and continued on.

"What did she say about the shooting?" I asked Carlson.

"Nothin'. She wanted to see the one who handled the story. It's Hurst's. He's entitled to whatever's in it. But I think it's just another nut. Fidgety and lookin' past me all the time she was talking."

We sat there and waited for Alan. From twelve stories below came the dulled sounds of night traffic. Fire bells and the rumble of the apparatus. Sirens on the river. Locomotives blowing for clearance. The drone of a night mail plane coming or going. Staccato bursts that always give me the jumps and turn my thoughts to a holdup or a revolver duel only to find, ten times out of ten, that it was only the devilish backfiring of some automobile.

"That guy wants to get his carbon cleaned," Carlson remarked.

"Sounded like a big baby, didn't it?" I asked.

And that started me thinking. I had heard plenty of blowouts, backfires, racing motors and such noises often enough from the street below and none had ever seemed as clear and close as that before. I jumped to my feet.

"Hey, Carlson!" I looked at him and he seemed to have the same idea. "That didn't come from the street. Something's happened in the building."

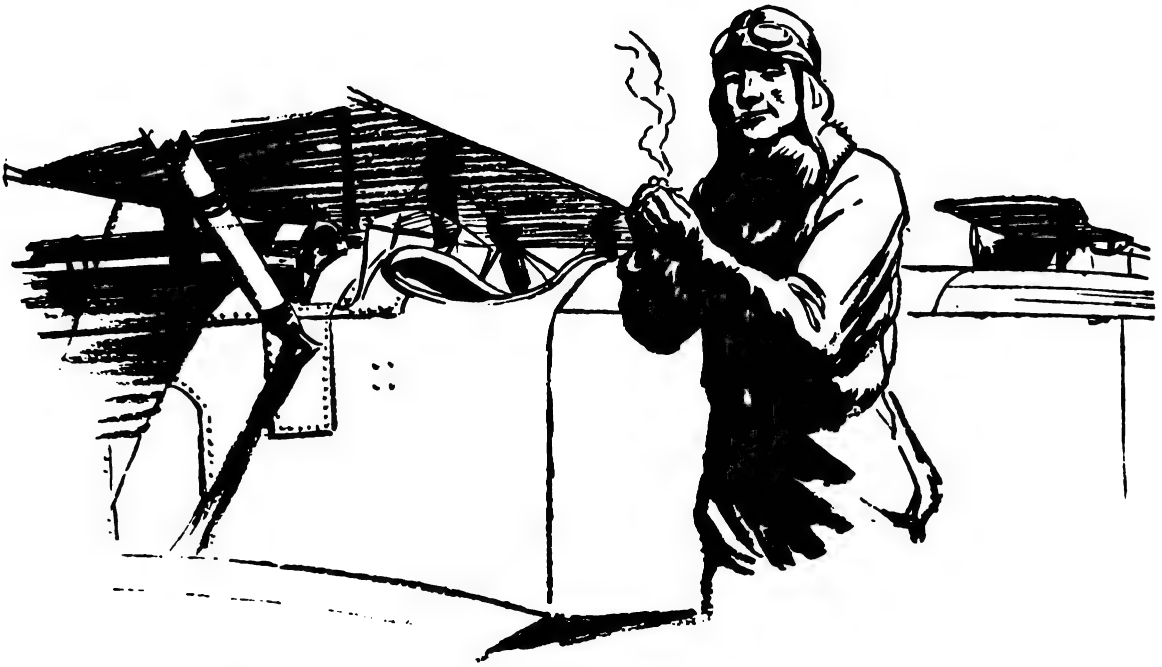
Together we ran for the door and burst through. Face down, across the waiting room table sprawled the body of the city's best rewrite man. Pinned to his back with a woman's hat ornament was the streamer head of the bulldog:

GANGDOM'S POOREST MARKSMAN!

And on it was written in red ink or crayon: *Boloney!*

The huge arched window of the room showed how it had been done. One, only one, of the small panes was shattered. The girl had stood him up for Sky High to pot at from the roof of the building next door.

Later, when I was helping to get Alan's things together, I looked at what he had in the typewriter. He had not quite finished a page. At the top, in the center, he had written, for temporary purposes, I suppose: WANTED—A TITLE.



NOTHING TO TELL

A Yarn of the Fighting Scout Squadrons

By NEIL T. MCMILLAN

"HE DID everything in the world to get away from me. He twisted, he zigzagged, he made vertical banks and finally he half rolled. I half rolled right after him, and while we were both on our backs I let him have it. My guns hadn't rattled more than ten seconds before down he went, burning like the devil."

"Good," Rothwell's twenty-two year old veteran commander, Captain Lake, muttered. "Very good indeed. But where did this happen?"

"About thirty miles back of the Hun lines."

"Too far away for anybody to confirm the fight from the ground. Any other ships about?"

"I saw none."

"'Fraid then, Rothwell, that you won't get credit for your Hun. That makes your fifth that you claim that you've gotten on lone patrol and no confirmation, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you've never picked up so much as a bullet hole in your own wings. You're clever, Rothwell."

"Thank you, sir."

One after another, like pigeons coming home to roost, the Camels of the evening patrol whistled into the field, leveled out and landed. Their pilots climbed from the machines, lit cigarets and pulled off the heavy flying suits, boots and mittens that proclaimed that they had been in the coldness of three miles above the earth. Then they trooped into the mess hall and gathered around the bar at the end of the room.

"Well, fellows," Lake said, "Rothwell got another Hun today."

"All by himself?" Simpson inquired.

"All by himself," Lake nodded.

"And no confirmation, as per usual?" Mahoney asked pointedly.

"No confirmation," Lake ageed.

"And no bullet holes?" Martin questioned.

"No bullet holes," Lake agreed further.

"He's a liar," Little Snodgrass said emphatically.

Rothwell set down his glass and walked to the belligerent little pilot.

"I beg your pardon, but what did you say?"

"You heard me," Snodgrass replied and continued to speak slowly as if weighing each word carefully before uttering it. "I've been on this particular little stretch of front for three months—which means that I've seen a whole lot of this man's war—and I say that any bird that has been out only ten days and claims that he has knocked down five Huns that nobody ever saw is a damn liar."

Rothwell drew back his arm to strike, but it was caught from behind. He turned to look into the angry eyes of Lake.

"Go to your quarters and don't come back until mess."

Rothwell shook his arm free and argued.

"You heard him call me a liar, didn't you?"

"Yes," Lake agreed. "I heard him call you a liar, and I'm not so sure but that he's right. Now you beat it to your quarters and I don't want to see you until mess."

Rothwell turned to give the little Snodgrass a look that he meant to be a promise that he would settle with him later, spun on his heel and walked out. He made his sullen way to his quarters and sat down on the edge of his bunk. To salve his feelings, he wrote a lengthy and lurid account of his flight that day in his diary, adding to it descriptions of his fellow pilots that were anything but complimentary.

Feeling somewhat better, he entered the mess hall at mealtime with his usual blustering manner and laughed and drank with the others, who, too, seemed to have forgotten any hostility they may have felt earlier in the evening. When every member of the squadron had pushed back his chair and had lighted a cigaret, Captain Lake got to his feet.

"Rothwell, tell us about your fight."

Rothwell looked up in surprise and hesitated. Someone tipped his chair forward and spilled him on his feet. Hands clapped. Cheers, warmed with wine, filled the room. Rothwell looked at the faces around him, trying to find in them some reason for the sudden change in the attitudes of their owners.

"Go on, go on. Tell us about it," Lake encouraged.

So Rothwell launched into a vivid reviewal of the fight, adding more and more details as he went on. He was interrupted repeatedly by cheers, but at length was able to conclude.

"Then, I saw smoke start from his ship. Then he burst into flames and turned on his back. And then he went down."

He returned to his chair in a roar of applause. Captain Lake got to his feet and waited for the noise to subside.

"It looks," he said and glanced at a slip of paper in his hand, "as if we have confirmation of this fight after all. I have here a note that was dropped on our airdrome just after sunset by a Fokker. Shall I read it?"

"Sure, read it."

"It is in German but I have had one of our men translate it. The translation is.

"One of your gentlemen this afternoon shot down in flames one of my best aces in single combat almost directly over my airdrome. I should deem it a great pleasure to meet this wonderful fighter of yours over the lines at dawn tomorrow. Several of my gentlemen will be with me, but I can assure your pilot that the fight will be strictly between us two.

Baron Von Richtofen"

THE note and the name shocked Rothwell like ice water. He felt the blood drain from his face, his hands, seemingly his whole body, and leave them trembling and cold. The ace of all the German aces in single combat . . . Why, that meant death! He realized, after a moment, that all eyes were upon him. He tried to smile. Little Snodgrass pushed back his chair and got to his feet.

"Rothy, I apologize. You did get a Fokker this afternoon, after all, didn't you?"

Rothwell gazed at him fixedly for a minute, saw that his lips were ready to turn up in a sneer and regained his composure.

"Of course, I did," he replied hotly.

"I'm sorry I called you a liar," Snodgrass concluded and sat down.

Lake picked up his glass, raised it and shouted:

"Bottoms up to the man who's good enough to draw a personal challenge from the Jolly Baron."

They all drank, draining their glasses to the last drop.

"Now then, Rothwell," Lake said as he set down his glass, "you had better hit the hay. You'll need your head in the morning. Won't do to get tight the night before you meet the Baron. Besides, it would be awful to have to tell Saint Peter that you got plastered on your last night on earth."

"Aw, let him stay," Snoddy broke in. "Saint Pete won't care when he finds out he's an aviator."

"Sure, let him stay," Martin added. "He'll probably be dead tomorrow night. Let him have his fun tonight."

"All right," Lake agreed. "Let him stay if he wants to. How 'bout it, Rothwell, want to stay and get soused?"

Rothwell looked up at him and then at the circle of faces.

"You all take it for granted that I'll accept the challenge."

Lake replied instantly in a voice that rang like steel.

"You're not going to do anything else, are you? If not, your request for a transfer will be approved."

Rothwell again looked around the ring of faces, seeing open hostility in every eye. He rose to his feet.

"It's my opinion that my request for a transfer would be mighty welcome to all of you."

"You ain't so dumb," Little Snodgrass said dryly.

Rothwell turned to Lake.

"My compliments to you, sir," he said with all of the sarcasm he could command. "I'll fight this Dutchman in the morning. In the meantime, you, and the whole bunch, can go plumb to hell!"

He made a smart right face, strode to the door and stepped out. He took three paces into the dark and stopped to look up at the stars. Back of him he heard a muffled voice that he knew was Snodgrass's imitating his own.

"My compliments to you, sir. Go to hell!"

A gale of laughter followed.

Rothwell clenched his fists, set his jaw, shut his eyes and moaned. He stood in tense silence for a moment, then relaxed suddenly and looked up at the stars again. His hands spread out in a gesture of despair.

"Aw, well, what difference does it make?" he muttered. "Nobody'll miss me"

He would be killed. He was certain of that. From the time he had taken a training plane off the ground for the first spin, he had felt that sooner or later one of these frail, man-made birds would kill him. He had only wanted to go as far as possible, blaze as bright a path as he could, before he should take that final, frightful plunge toward an earth that would rush up to crash him. Tomorrow was the day it would happen and he wouldn't be missed. He had talked too much. That was his sin. Tomorrow, at dawn, he would go out alone, in body and spirit, for his rendezvous with Death.

So he walked to his quarters, took out his diary, wondered what a man would write about on his last night on earth, wrote nothing and went to bed. In a few minutes, it seemed but a few minutes, an orderly was shaking his shoulder.

"Time for the dawn patrol, sir."

"Huh? Oh! all right. How's the ceiling?"

"Seems to be good, but there are clouds, sir."

The orderly helped him into his flying clothes. When he was fully dressed, Rothwell put a cigaret in his mouth, wondered at the steadiness of his hand and leaned forward to take advantage of the flame that the orderly had struck for him.

"Thanks," he said. "And say, Johnny, you needn't bother about making up my bunk. And get my things together, ready for shipment. I won't be back."

He took an immense satisfaction out of the startled look that leapt into the orderly's eyes.

"So long," he said cheerfully and stepped out the door.

He was six paces away, when the door opened and the orderly called after him with a choke in his voice:

"Good-by, sir."

THE eastern sky was showing a faint gray that announced that his last day was dawning. The ships that were to form the dawn patrol were already on the line, squatting in the darkness. He walked to his own plane and climbed in.

"Petrol on, sir?" a mechanic asked.

"Petrol on," Rothwell replied.

The mechanic primed the engine, stepped back and called:

"Contact, sir?"

"Contact," Rothwell yelled and turned the switch.

The mechanic whirled the propeller, the

engine coughed, spat, and caught with a roar.

As he waited for his engine to warm, Rothwell looked over at the other ships and the pilots standing near them in the gloom. One of the figures came to him. It was Lake's voice that asked:

"Going through with it, Rothwell?"

"Nothing else but," Rothwell answered boastfully. "I'm going to get my sixth Hun this morning."

"Well, good luck."

"Thanks, but I wish I could think you meant it."

Lake turned to reply but Rothwell gave the signal to his mechanics to jerk the chocks from his wheels. He turned to face the wind and roared across the field. A pull on his stick lifted him into the cool, damp air of the morning.

With the nose at the maximum climbing angle he rose steadily, straight toward the front lines. As he rose, the sun came up to meet him and flooded him with light while the war diseased earth under him was still clothed with purple shadow.

He climbed to the scattered clouds, found a wide way through them and flew until he could look down on their crests. The lines were under them. He was at the appointed place but he could see no other ships.

For ten minutes more he climbed in wide circles. The clouds became more scattered. Through a hole in them he saw a lone artillery plane with the markings of the Allies on its wings. Then he saw the Huns, seven of them, silhouetted against the white expanse of a cloud. It must be Richtofen and his gentlemen waiting for him and in the meantime stalking the artillery plane.

"Here goes nothing," Rothwell muttered and dove.

Suddenly the Fokkers left the shelter of the cloud and also dove. For a fraction of a second Rothwell thought that he was the cause and then realized that they were going down to crash the artillery plane. Rothwell steepened his dive and followed, wondering if his ship would stay together when he pulled up. But it mattered little if he could get in a shot at the great Richtofen before the Germans knew he was near.

Below him the lone Allied plane turned sharply and raced toward France. Evidently the pilot had seen the German death, diving upon him. The Fokkers lessened their dive and Rothwell, going down in a terrific sound of roaring motor and screaming wires, overtook them as if they were stationary.

He saw one of the Huns look up and wag his wings frantically to attract the attention of the others. The leader turned his head. Rothwell looked into the startled eyes through the sights of his guns and pressed his triggers. The twin guns, stuttered into life. The Hun zoomed and banked. Rothwell pulled up steeply to avoid a collision and shot up three hundred feet above the Hun formation. He looked down. His enemy was banking to come up under his tail.

Rothwell half rolled to his back, dove, pulled up, turned and was again over the Hun's tail. He would make sure of his shot this time. But the Hun, wise in the ways of battle, went into a steep bank and made it difficult for Rothwell to get his sights upon him. Around and around the two ships roared as if spinning on the ends of strings. Gradually Rothwell's Camel, turning inside of the Fokker, lessened the distance between them and Rothwell squinted through his sights.

A shadow flicked across his wings. Tracer bullets streaked past his ear. Splinters flew from his dashboard and holes jumped into the fabric of his wings. Then the wheels and belly of a Fokker rushed over his head.

Rothwell saw red. One of Richtofen's gentlemen had dived on him to save his leader. It wasn't in the agreement. It was a breach of sporting etiquette that caused him to set his jaw and vow to get the Fokker that he was chasing. This Richtofen had deliberately set a trap for him, had he? Then, one of them was going to be crushed in that trap. Either Richtofen or he would go down—Richtofen, if he could bring the Camel's guns to bear before one of the other planes could get him.

All fear was gone as he hung grimly to the tail of the leader. Hung in spite of more machine gun hammering behind him and more lead that ripped its way through his already pock-marked plane; hung and fired.

He saw his own tracers streaking into the engine of his target, moved the stick slightly and saw the smoke streaks travel into the cockpit. The pilot crumpled. The Fokker slid off on one wing crazily, turned over and spun. Rothwell dove and kicked rudder to escape the leaden hail that was beating around him.

A Fokker on his tail followed him. Rothwell went into another vertical bank. This time he was the pursued. This time he was trying to keep death dealing guns from being trained upon him. He was busier than he had ever been in his life, but even then he looked down and saw his victim end his plunge in a straight dive and crash.

He had won his fight, but these comrades of Richtofen's were anything but the gentlemen he had called them. Rothwell flew with the knowledge that the odds were a hundred to one against him, but with the anger and courage of the outraged. His steep bank was costing him altitude, but he was turning in a shorter circumference than the persistent Fokker on his tail. Soon he would be doing the chasing, if only the others would leave him alone.

Two of them dove together and shot at him. And while one zoomed, the other dove. Immediately Rothwell dove after him, heedless of the fact that the Hun he had been about to chase would have a clear shot at his tail. The Fokker beneath him pulled up, and, as it did, Rothwell pressed his triggers and raked the fuselage with bullets. Instantly the Hun ship burst into flames and was gone.

Rothwell heard the guns of a German behind him and pulling his stick into his stomach, skyrocketed upward and kicked rudder. He came down in a half spin. A Fokker was in front of him, banking. Holding his own ship practically in a stall, Rothwell followed the Hun with his chattering guns. One suddenly jammed and stopped but the other poured lead into enemy's cockpit. The Fokker seemed to hesitate in mid-air and then nosed down and crashed almost immediately after. Rothwell was surprised to find that he was almost on the carpet.

No enemy was near him at the moment. The fires were in front of him. Putting his nose down as much as he dared he streaked for home.

Only a few feet off the ground, he ran the gauntlet of the fire from the German trenches, felt that his plane was hit again and roared over the heads of the American doughboys. He glanced back. The Fokkers were climbing for altitude far behind him.

ROTHWELL climbed his own ship and headed for the airdrome. His engine began to smell stinking hot. He knew that a bullet, that last hit from the ground probably, had pierced his crankcase and let out all the oil. He nursed the laboring engine until he was over the field and cut throttle. The propeller turned over a few times at idling speed and stopped with a jerk. The bearings had frozen.

He slipped the plane to the ground, leveled out, touched his wheels, bounced, came down again and groundlooped because of a shot tire. The left wing dug into the ground; the ship tipped up on it and stopped.

Rothwell stepped out in wonderment at the fact that his feet were on firm ground again and he was alive. Captain Lake was the first to get to him.

"Whew!" he whistled as his eyes took in the shot-up condition of the bus. "You sure got into it that time, didn't you?"

Rothwell did not even bother to reply, but turned on his heel and walked across the field to his quarters. The orderly met him.

"I didn't do like you told me, sir. I made up your bunk. I kind of had a hunch you'd be back."

"Thanks," Rothwell said and smiled the first genuine smile he had known in months. He removed his flying suit, dabbed at his face with cold water and made his way to the mess hall. Snodgrass pulled out a chair for him and invited him to sit down. Rothwell accepted the invitation without a word.

There was a different attitude in the room toward him, a different look in the eyes that looked at him. A sense of being welcome came over him. An orderly called Lake to the telephone. He came back with a look of admiration shining in his face.

"It was Thompson," he explained, "over at the observation airdrome. He says he was flying an artillery bus this morning when a formation of seven Huns started to come down on him. He extends his eternal thanks to the damn fool who jumped seven Fokkers all alone and saved his skin."

All looked at Rothwell, but he held his silence.

"And," Lake continued, "he says that the damn fool got three of the Huns and got away."

Still Rothwell kept his silence.

"Say, Rothy," Lake asked, "come clean and tell me. Weren't those other fights, you talked so much about, all fakes?"

Rothwell acted on impulse and nodded.

"Well, then," Lake stated, "now that you've confessed, I'll confess, too. That note was a fake. Richtofen isn't anywhere near this particular part of the front."

Now Rothwell understood why the other Huns had not stood off and let him battle the leader.

"You see," Lake said apologetically, "you were such a liar that we thought you were yellow and wanted to scare you out of the squadron."

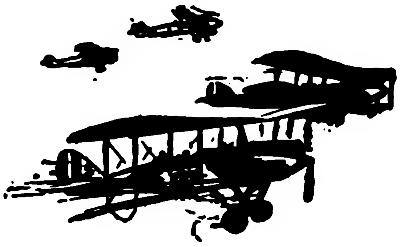
Rothwell raised his eyes and replied frankly:

"I don't blame you."

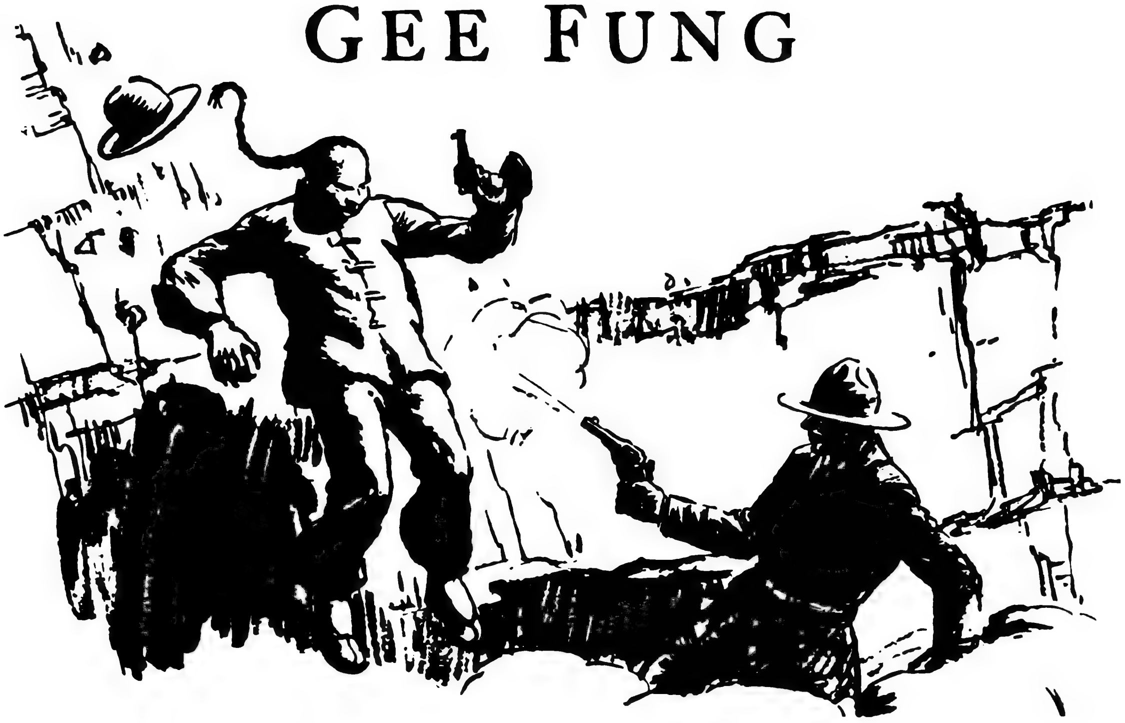
"And now," Lake said, "tell us about the scrap."

Rothwell smiled.

"There's nothing to tell."



THE SUBTLETY OF GEE FUNG



The Story of a Grim Menace and a Quaint and Devious Defense

By LAWRENCE WM. PEDROSE

TRULY civilization is but a veneer, thin as the blush on a wild grape, mused Gee Fung, as he lifted a boulder into position on the ledge and wedged it so it would not roll back into the cañon. Two men, meeting by chance on the trail, accidentally bump into each other. The first curses and speaks disparagingly of the other's ancestry, and the second man flies into a murderous rage. Since early dawn such creatures had been passing up and down through the notch in the hills, singly or in groups, carrying creels and flyrods. They were a noisy lot, as boisterous as they were energetic, and they reminded Gee Fung of the wind brats that shrieked in Thunder Creek Cañon when storms rode the peaks.

The first day of April, each year, witnessed an influx of these arrogant, khaki clad men. They pushed everything out of their path; and the sensitive deer, the soft voiced marmot and the playful bear, knowing their intolerance, stole silently into the shadows and watched them pass. Only an hour previously, two red faced, puffing youths had halted on the trail, and, discovering Gee Fung toiling among the rocks a stone's throw above their heads, hailed him:

"Hello, wolf bait! What d'ye think you're doin, buildin' a fort?"

Gee Fung looked down with a quick smile, and indicated a row of granite boulders which he had placed along the face of the ledge.

"Me build wall," he said, "All same Big Wall of China. You come next year and mebbe be finished."

"A Chinese wall!" scoffed the fisherman. "Get that! Goin' to run it clear across the mountains, I suppose! That old Chink's goofy!"

"He's crazy, all right, or he wouldn't try to compete with nature that way," agreed the other. "Queer cusses, those Chinamen. You can find them in the most God forsaken places all the way from British

Columbia to California, prospecting the creeks where white men mined in the early days. They make enough to keep body and soul together, and once in a while hit a pay streak. One of them found a rich outcropping over on Nip 'n' Tuck last summer, and was hammering out about ten dollars a day when Jasperson, that mining engineer from Rockport, happened onto him. Chinks can't own anything, you know, so Mr. Engineer kicks him off the creek, stakes the claim, and sells it to a mining company."

"Easy money!" laughed his companion. "Maybe a fellow ought to look into these things!"

For a moment Gee Fung believed the intruders would climb up to him. Surely, thought he, it is easier to stem a torrent than to satisfy the lust of man. The strangers could see him plainly, and he tried not to show anxiety lest they realize his importance. But presently they passed on up the trail.

UNTIL the pencil shafts of the sun, slanting down between the black firs that crowned the cliffs, indicated it was noon, Gee Fung rolled stones up from the bed of the creek and set them in a row on the ledge. It was a titantic task, and he had been laboring like this for a fortnight; yet he had created a foundation only three feet by twenty-five feet in dimension. Another ten feet to go, then he could begin building upward on the wall. But there was no discouragement in his old, wrinkled face as he scrambled down to the trail and swung up it at a coolie trot. After covering a hundred yards, he turned at right angles to the path, pressed through a thicket of tall, nodding hemlocks, and entered a branch cañon which was screened from sight of the main trail. In a cluster of saplings lay a small, dilapidated log cabin.

The dwelling, built by a miner during one of the early day gold rushes, had a sagging puncheon door, and the sheet iron chimney which thrust upward from the eaves was rusty and bent. Mud chinking in the walls had dropped out in places, and there were spatters of thick green moss on the shake roof. Burlap covered the opening of the single window. No one passing up or down the main trail would suspect the presence of the cabin, or of a clear spring that bubbled from a cluster of mossy rocks behind it and disappeared again into the ground a few feet in front of the shack.

Gee Fung went round to a rear door. This portal had been rehung on its rusty hinges. His felt soled boots made no sound as he approached. He pulled open the door and surprised a stranger kneeling beside his tattered blankets in a far corner. The man sprang to his feet, and a small black pistol appeared in his hand.

The intruder also was a Chinaman, dressed like Gee Fung in flowing blouse and baggy trousers, except that his garments were of finer material and new. He was young and had lean features and hard eyes, and his movements were as quick as those of the bobcats that roamed the timber. For a moment Gee Fung felt stark fear. He thought he had been marked for death, and a hatchet man had been dispatched to carry out the sentence. Then as he saw the other, with a contemptuous smile, put away the pistol, he breathed easier.

"What have I that you should covet?" he asked meekly.

"You wrong me," the other assured him. "I have traveled far and was but seeking rest. Even the most humble pallet is superior to a bed in the woods."

Gee Fung's confidence had returned. It was apparent the man was merely an emissary of thieves.

"Does the falcon seek rest in the nest of the pheasant?" he retorted. "Would a wolf share the bed of a lamb?"

The intruder tensed as if he would spring upon his accuser, and his lips curled viciously.

"Dare you brave the anger of the Tong of Many Shadows?" he snarled. "When you receive a guest, must you voice suspicions like an evil old woman? Look at your hoard of gold and see if I have disturbed it!"

But Gee Fung was not to be trapped. He shrugged dispiritedly.

"The bird with flaming wings who stores food in the trees and returns to find his caches plundered by the hawk and the woodborer is no more unfortunate than I," he sighed.

"Then why do you waste your time building a house of stone?" demanded the visitor. "There is no profit in another dwelling when you already have one. You cannot rent it to the robins."

Gee Fung was secretly pleased. The visitor had spied on him down there in the cañon, and believed he was constructing a stone house. Good. His secret was safe. He had told prying white men he was building a big Chinese wall. He would let his countryman think it was a dwelling. Probably he would erect two walls and give it a roof. Suddenly he straightened and a look of fiery resolve came into his eyes.

"My ancestors did not dwell in bamboo huts on the rivers and catch fish like carrion birds," he declared. "They built stone palaces high up on the peaks where the eagles nest. They lived like mandarins and collected toll from those who traveled in the mountains. Such a house will I build, and men will come to me and bring me gifts, for I shall be a just ruler."

He stood like one transfixed, staring into the distance. The visitor studied him with growing uneasiness and edged toward the door.

"At present I live in a humble cabin," continued Gee Fung, "and rich travelers pass me by. I've sat at night on the wall of the cañon and heard them. When I shout to them, they scorn me with their silence. They can ignore me now; but when I have built a magnificent house and can command respect, they will be glad to curry favor from me!"

The visitor reached the door, opened it quickly and slipped out. For a long moment, Gee Fung did not move, but he listened intently, and a crafty smile crossed his face. He heard the footsteps of the other as the man darted round the house and ran precipitately down the path. Then he went outside and crossed to the spring.

The rocks where the water bubbled from the side hill were waist high. Behind them was a dammed up area several feet wide which was overgrown with watercress. Gee Fung bent over naturally until his lips touched the spring. Then his feet seemed to slip and he plunged one of his hands into the grass. Before he recovered his balance, he had explored among the roots with his fingers and located a small, soggy leather bag which was filled with a heavy substance that grated to his touch. Satisfied, he straightened, wiped his lips with his sleeve, and casually turned back to the cabin. Had vandals been watching, they would have detected nothing unusual in the old man's actions.

In a few minutes a plume of smoke lifted above the twisted stovepipe of the cabin, and from the partly open door came the musky odor of cereals and ripe meat cooking.

GEE FUNG toiled up the cañon trail. Across his thin shoulders he carried a sapling pole, from which was slung two heavy packages. A red squirrel scurried up a near-by mossy windfall, barking saucily at him as he passed. Overhead a mountain robin teetered joyfully on the tasseled limb of a hemlock and sent its skirling call up the draw. A mother blue grouse with plucked breast, surprised as it drank in the creek just below the trail, sounded cries of alarm and flopped about as if grievously wounded. Gee Fung smiled and carefully set down his burden, then, with boyish glee, lifted a partly dried bough which the wind gods had plucked from the firs crowning the cliffs. Among the mossy rocks on the creek bed five tiny balls of speckled brown crouched. The eyes of the chicks were closed as if shutting off view of an enemy provided ample concealment. The parent grouse fluttered back to the man's feet and tried to lure him away with its pitiful cries and queer gymnastics. Chuckling, he replaced the branch over the fledgings and nodded reassurance to the parent grouse as he picked up his load.

Gee Fung was happy, and why should he not be? He had paid his dues to the Weeping Poppies, and added to his savings in the bank, which were to assure him lasting peace and the return of his commonplace bones to the land of his fathers. Several times yearly he made these trips outside, to purchase necessary food and clothing and visit with his friend Ah Goon, the tailor at Rockport and a fellow tongman who saved for him the weekly newspapers from their home in distant We-Ch'eng. Ah Goon also kept him apprised of the activities of the various tongs and their conflicts.

On this last trip, Gee Fung had a matter of great importance to discuss with his friend. It concerned the stone structure which he was erecting in Thunder Creek Cañon. Thus far, he had deceived everyone who had viewed it. He knew from experience of the avariciousness of the white people, and understood well the rapacity of his own countrymen. Ah Goon alone could be trusted with the great secret. Fifty summers had passed since Gee Fung and Ah Goon left the land of their ancestors in search of fortune. Life in a barbarian land had been harsh. They had suffered and often despaired of seeing again the beloved poppy fields of We-Ch'eng. Now, due to Gee Fung's new enterprise, their hopes had revived. Fate willing, they might yet return to the land of their birth and spend their remaining days in peace and tranquillity.

Presently Gee Fung came in sight of the ledge whereon he had spent so many days of hard labor. He paused to admire the results of his industry. His handmade wall had achieved pleasing proportions. It now stood four feet high, and the broad foundation would support many additional tiers of stone. And it had been so designed that it would escape the eye of a casual passerby. A touch of moss here and there, probably a few transplanted shrubs from the cliffs when the structure was completed, and the camouflage would be perfect. And if its character were surmised, no one would imagine it contained a secret. It looked like nothing more than a purposeless structure erected by some eccentric hill dweller who could think of nothing else to do.

Suddenly Gee Fung halted, alert and suspicious. Through the unchinked openings of the artificial wall he had detected a movement. It was not a flitting shadow such as a prowling hill animal would make. In the woods several rods above the ledge something else stirred among the scraggly wild huckleberry bushes.

Gee Fung knew his approach had not been discovered. He looked round. A few feet to his right was a squat laurel with a wide spread of dense green foliage. He darted behind the shrub and laid down his burden. Other laurels and thickets of stunted cedars dotted the hillside. Cautiously he made his way up the slope, taking advantage of every bush and tree. He was on the opposite side of the cañon from the trespassers, but he had no designs on them other than to learn who they were and what their purpose might be.

A COUGAR, seeking a vantage point from which it might spring upon an unsuspecting stag, would not have climbed the steep hill with greater stealth than did Gee Fung. After several minutes' toil, he reached a tiny plateau wooded with dwarf trees, high enough that he could look down upon the other ledge. He was not greatly surprised to learn that the intruders were the red faced fishermen who had hailed him from the trail a fortnight previously.

"There's nothing here but a wall of stones, Bill," called the man on the ledge. "That Chink was just a nut after all."

The other slid down a twenty-foot precipice of dirt and stones and joined him. Together they studied the result of Gee Fung's labor, quite unaware that the object of their suspicion was spying on them from the plateau across the cañon.

"Look at that creek bed," snorted the man called Bill, pointing below. "He's gathered every boulder within a hundred feet and rolled it up here. Wonder what he'll do when the stones are all gone?"

"That's simple," laughed the other. "He'll just sit back and wait for a freshet to bring down another supply. Let a chinook wind hit the glaciers of Thunder Mountain and this creek will become a raging torrent overnight. But the big idea is, why in Tophet should he build this wall? I had a hunch there was some purpose behind it, but it appears to be just a case of some nut making himself a job."

"Look," interjected Bill, "here comes somebody up the trail." With mild interest they watched a slender man who wore whipcords, high laced boots and a broad brimmed, black hat coming up the cañon. "Why," supplemented Bill, "it's Jasperson, from Rockport. Old Eagle Eye's out on a snoopin' expedition, I suppose. They say he's made a fortune, but has never rawhided out a yard of ore or staked a miner to a plug of tobacco. Kind of a leech. Knows every strip of mineral ground in Western Washington and what every prospector's doin'. If a man finds pay dirt on some old corporation grant, he revives the company, and lays claim to it. Usually gets away with it, too. He's the guy who ran that old Chink off Nip 'n' Tuck Creek last year."

A look of intense hate came into Gee Fung's face at sight of the mining man.

Feral lights appeared in his bloodshot eyes and his long fingers reached out and grasped a jagged piece of loose rock. His thin lips drew back and he breathed with a soft, hissing sound.

The restless, roving gaze of the engineer discovered the men standing on the ledge, and he studied them critically as he approached. He had sharp features, and there was something hawklike in his interest as he noted the unusual formation on which they were standing.

"Hey, Jasperson," cried Bill, "want to see something funny? Steer a course up to this ledge!"

The engineer nodded and climbed up to them.

"An old yellow guy's building a Chinese wall here," grinned Bill. "Aims to run it clear across the mountains, he said. What do you make of it?"

Not a detail of Gee Fung's work escaped Jasperson. He scanned the face of the slope against which one end of the wall rested, as if this might offer an explanation. He was close mouthed and did not convey his thoughts to the other men, but they could see he was not disinterested. He moved several rocks from the wall and peered between the crevices. Finally he grinned.

"Wouldn't it be a good joke to dump all these stones back into the cañon?" he suggested.

Gee Fung, on his lofty perch, heard him and recognized the motive which had prompted the suggestion. Jasperson was curious to know if anything lay beneath that rock wall and thought that by appealing to the vandal instinct of the youths he might accomplish the razing of it without soiling his own hands. But the proposal, to Gee Fung's delight, stirred only antagonism.

"A hell of a joke that'd be!" sneered Bill. "If you saw an old man climbing a mountain, you'd get a kick out of pushing him back down, wouldn't you, Jasperson?" Disgusted, he gestured to his companion. "C'mon, Harry. This guy's a big smell to me!" And he climbed down to the trail, followed by the other. In a few moments the youths were lost from sight down the draw.

Jasperson, apparently unmoved by the sarcasm of the others, spent several minutes on the ledge before he, too, departed. And when he went up the trail, he paused twice within sight of the strange wall and studied it speculatively. His actions brought a thoughtful frown to the watcher on the plateau above. The interest of the two youths who had gone down the cañon gave Gee Fung no concern; but he felt differently about Jasperson. Not until the man had been gone for half an hour did he reveal himself. Then he silently made his way back to the spot where he had cached his packages, his lips drawn in a grim, straight line.

GEE FUNG'S enterprise brought him unexpected fame. Travelers heard of him and went miles out of their way to watch him at work. Some were silently amused, others sarcastic. He gave a smile to all, and his boundless good nature won him many a helping hand. By June, the wall was completed to his satisfaction, but he did not rest. From the cliffs he procured small alpine shrubs and planted them. The number of visitors increased, and he was glad of the diversion, for he knew evil forces were at work, and as long as sightseers continued to flock into the cañon no one would actually attempt to pry into his secret. Ah Goon, down at Rockport, also was busy. Trusted men must be found, financial backing obtained, and numerous other details worked out.

Jasperson returned one July morning and surprised Gee Fung, who was planting a vine at the foot of the wall and so engrossed in his task that he was unaware of the other's approach. Gee Fung had intended to keep out of sight of the engineer if possible.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" exclaimed the mining man suspiciously. "I thought Nip 'n' Tuck Creek was your stamping ground?"

For a moment a homicidal mania seized Gee Fung. He wanted to hurl a rock into the face of the sneering plunderer.

"It is no honor to be visited by the son of thieves," he said quietly. "Do even the worthless stones which I bring up here arouse his lust? You robbed me once; is it impossible to satisfy your greed?"

The engineer chose to ignore the accusation. He indicated the pile of rocks with a testy gesture.

"What is the meaning of this foolishness?" he demanded.

Gee Fung smiled blandly.

"I have told of it until my tongue is weary," he returned. "I am an old man, and it is fitting that I should leave a monument. I have erected a wall of rocks which are without value, and have made a thing of beauty. I may construct a dwelling on top of it. People will forever point to it and say: 'That was built by Gee Fung. He must have been an important man.' "

"Tommyrot!" snapped the exasperated mining man. "One box of dynamite could wipe out all you accomplished in a year. Might be a good thing, too, before those rocks tumble down into the gully and kill somebody."

The suggestion presented a new hazard to Gee Fung, and for a moment he trembled with apprehension. This man had the instincts of a tiger.

"Who would wish to destroy something that has no value?" he retorted mildly. "Surely none would be so depraved. Yet if it were destroyed as many times as there are stones in the wall, I would build it again until the despoilers grew weary of their work."

The engineer eyed him narrowly.

"You can pull your silly stories on other people, Fung, and make them believe you're just a balmy old bird, but you're not fooling me!" gritted Jasperson. "You've put those rocks here for a definite purpose, and I'm going to find out what it is!"

He departed down the cañon. When the mining man was lost from sight, Gee Fung hastened home, fished his savings from the spring and followed. He was short of supplies, but of greater importance, he must tell Ah Goon of the new menace.

It was mid-afternoon when he reached town. He hurried to the shop of his friend and told him of his fears. The tailor listened with patience but did not share Gee Fung's anxiety.

"A man visited me last night," he said soberly. "He was from the Tong of Many Shadows and came to collect a debt of honor. The new bride of the son of Li Sun, our esteemed counselor, was stolen by one of the Many Shadows. The Weeping Poppies have taken toll and the debt is satisfied. But now the sons of thieves say the girl has run away with a former lover and demand a life or the equivalent in gold. It has been decided to settle the matter amicably, and ten thousand taels are asked. The just apportionment is twenty-five dollars in gold."

"That is more than I can give," protested Gee Fung. "Will they not accept my promise to pay?"

"The hawk does not wait for the dove to hatch a nest of eggs, nor does the wolf wait for the doe to deliver its fawn," opined Ah Goon. "But have no fear, Gee Fung; you will be able to meet your obligation. I have completed the details of our enterprise and have found an honest white man to conduct it. I expect him tonight. He will take charge of our interests. Prevent, if you can, interference by that despoiler, Jasperson. He came into town but an hour ago, and I saw him go down to the company's powder house with a pack horse. I suspect he has evil designs."

GEE FUNG departed for home with less peace of mind than when he had come to town. As he entered the cañon he found a broken buckle on the trail. He recognized it as coming from the cinch of a pack animal, and knew that Jasperson had preceded him. Dusk was falling and it had become quite dark when he reached the scene of his recent labors. He turned off the trail and scouted among the bushes.

As he had anticipated, he found Jasperson's horse, stripped of its pack, concealed in a thicket. The engineer was not in sight. He spoke reassuringly to the animal so it would not be alarmed, and searched the ground for clues. The pack saddle lay under a huckleberry bush, and beside it was a wooden box from which the contents had been removed. The box was lined with heavy, brown waxed paper. He knew its character instantly. It was a container for explosives. His fears confirmed, he stole up the cañon past the ledge. He could hear no sound on the escarpment above, and the night had become as black as a witch's pocket. But soon the moon would rise, and he would be able to discern the actions of the engineer.

Some sixth sense warned him as he approached his cabin that he had a visitor. Also he felt sure Jasperson had not found his living quarters. The intruder must be one of his countrymen. So confident was he that his deductions were correct, he pulled the door open and spoke a greeting.

A snarl answered him. He entered boldly, walked to an end of the room and lighted a candle.

His guest was a muscular young Chinaman who sat crosslegged on the bed, his arms hidden in his loose sleeves. The man had almost apelike features and deep set, evil eyes. Gee Fung knew the concealed hands grasped weapons.

Gee Fung set the candle upon the floor and seated himself in front of his guest. He displayed no uneasiness, although he knew he was in the presence of a ruthless killer. A daring plan was forming in his mind, and it crowded fear from his thoughts. The man was more than a mere agent of the rival tong. He was one of the thieves that preyed upon his helpless countrymen under a cloak of authority. These parasites, like their victims, were of low caste, therefore their lives were of no value. If they slew, or were slain, no reprisals were demanded because they were of no importance.

"I know of your mission," he offered. "You come to exact payment for the daughter of Li Sun. It is a just claim, and a Weeping Poppy always pays honest debts."

The visitor spat at his host's knees.

"It was Li Sun, who is without dignity, that made the proposal," he sneered. "The Weeping Poppies are old women who shudder at the thought of bloodshed."

"Life is sweet," countered Gee Fung. "I know, because I have seen much of it. When it is taken, it no longer exists. But gold does not perish, even though it comes into the possession of knaves, and may still serve a good purpose. The payment, I am told, is twenty-five dollars."

"Not in your case, Gee Fung. You have become so rich that you can spend your time building foolish houses. From you we will exact double payment."

"But I am not rich," protested Gee Fung.

The other moved his hands significantly.

"One payment will be made in gold, then. The other . . ."

"No," purred Gee Fung. "Milk cannot be drawn from a dead cow. Nor is the hen disposed of when it lays its first egg." He shrugged resignedly. "Still, I am not poor. What you call my foolish house was built for a purpose. No one would believe it contained anything of value. Come with me, and I will show you that Gee Fung is a man of importance."

He rose, and the visitor got up with alacrity. Gee Fung noted the man's eyes were bright with avarice. Cautioning him to silence, he led the way up the hill from the cabin. He reached a wooded plateau and turned in a down cañon direction. After progressing a few hundred feet, he paused. The plunderer pressed close to his side. The moon was beginning to thrust its rim over the eastern horizon. At the feet of the men was revealed a thirty-foot precipice of earth and rocks, whose face was thinly covered with foliage. At the foot of the slope was a ledge and Gee Fung's stone wall.

Gee Fung thought he detected a movement close to the wall, but was not positive. At his feet he could feel a loose boulder about the size of his fist.

"The descent is here," he said softly. "I will show you."

Suddenly his hand shot out and grasped the arm of his unsuspecting companion, and he gave a quick shove. The man plunged down the slope in a cataract of débris, and Gee Fung picked up the stone at his feet and hurled it out upon the ledge.

An oath and a streak of flame, followed by the report of a pistol, answered the missile. The gun of the tongman at the foot of the slope replied. There followed a wild fusillade of shooting. Gee Fung turned and ran swiftly back in the direction from which he had come. Reaching the cabin, he did not pause but hastened down into the cañon. The ledge was ominously silent as he passed it from beneath. Straight to the thicket where Jasperson's pack pony was tied he dashed. Mounting the animal bareback, he guided it out into the trail. The moon by now offered sufficient illumination for the horse to see its way. Prodding it with his heels, Gee Fung rode it wildly down the cañon toward town.

THE gray chargers of dawn were advancing over Thunder Mountain when he returned. Accompanying him was a party of mounted men including two grimly silent riders who wore on their breasts shiny badges of authority. Ah Goon and a tall young man dressed in the garb of a mining engineer brought up the rear.

A delay of several hours had been experienced while word of the gun battle in the cañon was communicated to the sheriff at the county seat. The officer had driven to Rockport in a fast motor car, bringing with him one of his deputies. Gee Fung said he knew nothing of the fight but had seen two mysterious strangers loitering about the cañon the evening previously.

The guide called a halt at the foot of the cliff below his ledge, and one of the officers shouted a "hello." Only the echoes flung back by the rocky ramparts answered. The men dismounted and, with the sheriff in the lead, climbed to the ledge.

Inside the stone wall was revealed a scene of carnage. Jasperson was known as a dead shot, but his markmanship had been no more accurate than that of the tongman. The lifeless forms of both lay on the open ground, mute evidence of the desperate conflict. Beside the dead men lay emptied pistols.

"It's only forty-five miles to the Canadian boundary line, and in the early days there was a smuggling route up here," spoke up the sheriff. "Maybe it's being used again. That would explain the presence of the young Chinaman, but this white fellow is Jasperson, of the Rockport Company, and I don't think he was a part of the ring. The Chink must have happened on him and started something, and Jasperson shot it out."

From the base of the stone wall a pair of thin wires ran along the side of the cañon, and these were traced to a niche three hundred feet distant. Inside the sheltered niche was found a detonating cylinder used in blasting operations.

"That explains Jasperson's business here," decided the sheriff. "He was a scout for the mining company and was preparing to shoot that ledge. Probably found an outcropping of ore. We'd better take his equipment back to town with us."

The young mining engineer drew the officer aside.

"I represent a corporation which has filed on this ground," he said. "The fact that a location has been made evidently was unknown to Jasperson. He mined that stone wall and it will have to be set off. We'll get around to that soon, so why not let his stuff lay here, and we'll pay his employers for it?"

"Fair enough," agreed the sheriff. "There appear to be no witnesses to the duel, but I'll have to take Gee Fung down so he can tell what he knows to the coroner's jury."

"I'll be responsible for him and produce him when you want him," offered the engineer.

The suggestion was acceptable, and the officers were assisted in carrying the slain men to the ponies. The minions of the law departed with their silent cargo.

When the cañon was clear, the young engineer led the way to the niche up the cañon and set off the blast. Gee Fung saw the structure which he had spent months of hard labor in fashioning disappear as if by magic in an upflung curtain of dust, while the hills reverberated to the echoes of its passing. But the wall had served its purpose and he was content.

"Labor, judiciously expended, is as substantial as the sea," he said to Ah Goon, "and honest enterprise is eventually rewarded."

The trio returned to the ledge, and the engineer brushed aside a quantity of débris which had been blown against the face of the cañon wall. At his feet a stratum of soiled white quartz rock, a foot thick, marked with threads of green and sprinkled with mineral dust, was revealed. Drawing a small hammer from his pocket, he procured a bit of the quartz and scrutinized it.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it's richer even than the samples you sent out. It will probably run a hundred dollars to the ton in gold. Besides, there is a good percentage of silver or lead. You were deucedly clever to hide this like you did, Gee Fung."

The two venerable Chinese exchanged amused glances.

"A man gains wisdom after many trials," murmured Gee Fung.

Everybody's Meeting PLACE

Where writers, readers and the editor gather for informal discussion

THE VIRTUES OF IMPROVIDENCE

ONE day last December Henry Ford created a sensation by making the statement that "No successful boy ever saved money." The Associated Press broadcast the story. Presently financiers, savings bank officials and insurance company presidents were burning the wires with demands that he retract his words. The controversy may still be smouldering; I never learned how it was settled. Anyway, I shall take no part in it. Only one aspect of the matter interested me, and that I found no less than fascinating.

You probably read the statement at the time it was issued, but here is part of it again:—

After declaring that successful boys never saved money, and explaining that "they spent it as fast as they got it on things to improve themselves," Ford continued: "Instil in the minds of young men that they will never get anywhere without work. I never knew a young man that was worth five cents that wouldn't work, and even occasionally get into trouble in his efforts to learn. When I was a young fellow I got kicked out of as many shops as I was welcomed to."

In that last sentence, of course, lies the reason for Henry Ford's utterance. Doubtless he was a thorn in the side of more than one exasperated employer who tried to force him to stick to his task and earn an honest wage and save his money and not go poking his nose into things that did not concern him. But Ford was constitutionally unable merely to stick to his task and save money. Nor was he the sort capable of suppressing his curiosity to investigate machinery that had nothing to do with his job. Consequently, like many another youngster, he was shown the gate, doubtless without ceremony.

These traits are very close to those which spring from shiftlessness. At least, it is easy to understand how a busy employer might fail to distinguish between the two. Young men aplenty there are who know this to their regret. Thomas Edison probably found it out, the Wright brothers learned it, every boy who ever chafed at confinement and set forth to cross the world on his own or to build a machine out in the woodshed that would accomplish the feat for him, has faced it. The one thing that distinguished those very traits from shiftlessness was the capacity for work that these young men possessed, a capacity curiously overlooked by those who deemed them no-account. They are an honorable company, a courageous and wholehearted crew of adventurers, explorers, scientists, inventors and poets, and their history is the history of the world.

I would like to submit as an almost epic spectacle, one to go down the ages with Washington and the cherry tree, Bruce and the spider, Alfred and the cottager's burned cakes, that of Henry Ford being kicked out of a machine shop as a meddlesome incompetent not worthy of his pay.

WILD WATER

WHAT a tremendous spectacle the writer of this letter was permitted to witness. His vivid narrative needs no introduction and he has the floor forthwith.

In the January number of EVERYBODY'S you make reference to the Lackawanna River flooding into the Taylor Mine workings, and you request that someone describe it who could give first-hand information. I am taking the liberty of telling you something of it from the standpoint of an observer and a participant in the work of damming the rush of wild waters through a labyrinthine underground race-course which took in scores of miles of very valuable coal land. Picture if you can hundreds of miles of underground passages averaging in size about six foot high by twelve foot wide, forming a maze under the very streets of Scranton, and finally outcropping on the banks of the Lackawanna River, a hitherto harmless stream which had never before assumed flood proportions.

If you are at all familiar with the formation and peculiarities of the anthracite coal veins, and I presume that you are as you say you hail from these parts, you doubtless know that the veins all outcrop somewhere, and the vein which gave birth to this near tragedy pushed its black, glistening head into daylight far above what was considered a vulnerable spot for the river's attack even in times of extremely high water. But here in the Wyoming Valley we have learned in recent years to respect even simple streams which are fed from the mountains of melting snows from our sister Empire state. Assuredly we learned to do so on that momentous afternoon in early spring about five years ago when the wild waters rose overnight and beat a frenzied tattoo on the hitherto impregnable battlements that stood between it and an underground passageway that spread in a thousand directions. Branching through hundreds of gangways and airways it led to other workings at still lower levels, straight down vertical shafts and sloping planes.

All that night hundreds of men were toiling at the entrance in an effort to plug up the opening. Telegraph poles, mine cars, straw, hay, hundreds of tons of it, were being thrown into the yawning opening only to be sucked in under like so many chips of wood. All through the night this work continued. Mine officials, all expert in this kind of work, from all over the anthracite region, rushed to the scene and took charge and gave advice. How many tons were thrown into the opening will never be known, but toward morning the conglomeration finally took hold and the river was forced back into its normal channel once again. The weary workers went home to well earned beds and sleep, satisfied with an heroic job well done.

But what of the desolation underground? There were workers along the various gangways who at first knew nothing of the water's near approach, although a hasty warning had been sent by telephone and by messenger to every part of every mine. That only two lives paid the price speaks well for those in charge, for minutes only stood between safety and disaster.

Knowing, as I do, the workings through which the waters rushed so madly, I can picture in my mind's eye even now the devastation being wrought, as the torrent shoved and pushed its way from the point of entrance to where it finally came to rest at the lowest levels. I can picture loaded mine cars being tossed and tumbled with their precious contents until they wedged themselves against some obstacle; tracks firmly spiked to deeply imbedded cross-ties, and weighing twenty-five, forty and sixty pounds to the yard, pried loose and bent and twisted like so much rotten hay wire; mine doors, used to ventilate the shafts, torn from their hinges and carried along on the flood like a row boat on an angry sea; mine timber, used to support the roof, knocked loose by a side-swiping blow from a mine door or track iron; and then the deluge of falling roof as a consequence of its support being removed.

I know the pump operator who was on duty at the time of this flood, at the six hundred foot level, and I got the story from him just as it happened. He had been warned that the water was on its way, but he had had no idea that he would be unable to cope with it with his five great pumps, the biggest units in the whole anthracite region. He started his five units, and soon they were throwing their full quota. Confidently he watched these five beauties each giving forth the healthy hum of healthy motors, the peculiar whine of efficient centrifugal pumps functioning normally. As he waited he wished to play safe, so he signaled for the cage to stand by. He did not quite like the sound of the incoming waters.

The trickle increased into a stream, the stream into a sizable flow of water, and then came the avalanche! With a roar it turned the sharp corner just a little distance from the pump room proper and then came hurtling onto the motors driving the pumps. The pump runner leaped for the cage and pulled the bell rope and even as the cage started to move he heard the first motor go off the line as the over-load went into action. In a minute all were dead.

How the mines were finally all de-watered is another story, and suffice it to say that it was finally done and by these very same motors and pumps with the aid of others. The work of de-watering the workings was almost as herculean a task as that of stopping the flood before it had accomplished such havoc that it might have been impossible to again operate the mines. A masterpiece of fiction could be written with the above as a background.

M. T. Beddow,
Forty Fort, Pa.

WE GREET A NEWCOMER

NEWSPAPERMEN make good authors. Never having worked in a news shop myself, and being, despite occasional lapses from the profession, primarly an editor, I can make that statement gracefully. It must be true; so many newspapermen assure me so.

EDWARD ERD WALLIS, whose first story in EVERYBODY'S, *Wanted—A Title,* appears in this issue, makes no such declaration. What he says of himself is extremely modest; but with this present tale and one other in hand, I am persuaded to believe the above statement a fact. His introduction here, like his story, is short, but I leave them both confidently to your judgment.

Looking back thirty years there's little enough with reader interest worth reporting. I can slice my personal history into thirds and pick out the eventful highlights, just like that, one for each chapter of a fairly conventional existence. For instance:—

At ten, my first story, a piratical concoction—in more than one sense—of dirty mean skippers and scuppers dripping with blood. It attained a circulation of nineteen. (Figures based on the recollected number of near and dear relatives game enough to grin and bear it.) But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Memory has it that a great tooting of whistles and sirens and such greeted my initial arrival in the Wallis home on the Delaware River front in Philadelphia. The stork that had the contract must have been bang full of pride with the thought that here might be an admiral's son accorded the salute of a big city's shipping, not knowing, of course, that the organized clamor was for another of those periodic Cramp's Shipyard launchings. Incidentally, it was rumored that the nurse, looking from our third-story front window, almost dropped me on my head as the ship left the ways. Come to think of it, maybe she did.

There was a succession of mumps and measles . . . baseball and brick fights . . . sticking plaster and stitches . . . and some boys' stories sold and collected for during high school years. And so through two years of college, learning a lot, but just what I can't remember.

At the ripe age of twenty I became a reporter for the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*. A district man first, legging it to fires, murders, accidents, fights, and more fires, murders, etc. Then, inside, doing a bit of everything that came over the desk . . . parades, jewel robberies, district courts . . . six hours in the morgue getting acquainted with roaches and a deaf caretaker who handled his gruesome stock with the savoir faire of a grocery clerk . . . and, oh, yes—free lunches.

Then into advertising where for eight years I have been writing mostly for vacationists of things I haven't seen; of peaks that punch dents in the heavens, of fishing in far waters that puts hair on your chest, of a moon that hangs high in a starry sky and an ocean that growls deep down in its belly. Isn't that pretty?

So there I am to date. There's a number of big ambitions I've been working on, though I've realized two already—a wife, and a daughter as cute as can be—some say she looks like her dad.

Edward Erd Wallis

AN ADMIRAL AND A SAILOR

LAST issue I gossiped about L. MURNEY MINTZER'S *Periscope!* It is straight fiction, but it was founded on an actual occurrence stranger than any tale. I am not at liberty to reveal the details of the affair, but it is possible to narrate an anecdote which occurred much later and which is a direct issue of the war time episode.

The man responsible for the seizure of the German U-Boat by a group of American prisoners whose ship had been torpedoed by the submarine, later was decorated by Admiral Jellicoe for his gallant service in leading the mutiny. He was mate of the ill-fated ship. The ceremony in London was brief and it seemed, for all its solemnity, little more than another routine matter for Jellicoe and his busy aids, who had a war to win and a vast Armada to watch over day and night.

After the Armistice the mate resumed his peaceful seafaring career, returning to the obscurity of workaday life as whole regiments of distinguished fighting men were content to do. Four years after hostilities ceased he was at Port o' London with his ship. He went ashore one afternoon with the ship's charts in a case, and visiting the Admiralty Building in Whitehall, compared them with the official charts to bring the former up to date by sketching on them any reefs, channels or other nautical data of recent discovery.

It was late afternoon when he returned to his ship, hurrying to be aboard in time to catch the evening tide. As he walked through the dusk down a dingy street leading to the waterfront, the doors of a low dive suddenly burst open and out boiled a group of brawling, drunken men. They encompassed him before he could evade them, and though he wished nothing better than to be on his way, the strugglers threw him headlong into the muddy gutter and fell on top of him. Doubtless they were too aborbed in conflict to notice him, but a few blows came his way for all that.

Whistles blasted suddenly at either end of the street; the pelting boots of running Bobbies sounded an alarm that brought the brawl to an instant halt. The group dispersed and fled in every direction. And when the policemen arrived at the scene, with a few hapless fugitives in their grasp, the mate was sitting dazedly in the dank gutter, clutching tightly to the muddy chart case and wondering just what had hit him. He was seized, yanked to his feet, and marched smartly down the street in company with the other malefactors, bound for a police cell. Protests were of no avail; he was apprehended in a public disturbance, and the officers were adamant.

The procession advanced along the waterfront and as it passed a certain wharf, a purring limousine drew up at the gate and a naval officer in uniform of high rank stepped out. He paused to watch the body of proud Bobbies go by with their prisoners. Then he stepped after them quickly and brought the parade to a halt. He addressed the unfortunate mate by name, took his hand, inquired into his difficulty. The policeman stood by in frozen awe. Our mate stared at the high officer who strangely knew him and uttered the amazed, joyful name "Admiral Jellicoe!"

It was he; only once had he seen the mate, a stranger from another land coming before him to receive the token of gratitude of an Empire. Only once, yet he remembered, and offered what assistance a great lord could render to a seafaring man.

Needless to say, the mate was instantly released, and further, after a grateful grip of farewell with Jellicoe, was escorted to his ship with all honors. . . . That, gentlemen, is a tale of fact. And it may serve too to explain the magic by which great leaders hold the deepest loyalty of men.

SHOP TALK

THE contents of this issue show quite some disregard for the ancient and honorable editorial policy of playing up big names. Most of the authors listed are young and are only on their way to attain the fame which the future holds for them. Yet if names count, I feel rather proud of several that are included. Proud less of the names than of the good stories that accompany them . . . I might say the same for the April issue. **Robert Carse's** *Lost Empire* is one of those unusual tales which seem more fact than fiction. As with most good yarns, it is founded on actual events. I shall not disclose the plot of the story here, but when you come to read it, I think many of you will recognize the living drama behind this thrilling novelette of the French penal colony at Cayenne . . . **Allan Vaughan Elston**, author of *The Ranch On Red River*, will be familiar to many readers. He tells a Western story which will hold you in suspense to the last word—and which does so without the aid of rustlers or super-cowboys. Elston is a rancher, as his father was before him; his range is in northern New Mexico, where the bitterest feuds in Western history had their battlegrounds. He knows whereof he writes, and I promise you a corking yarn . . . **Ared White**, of whom we have heard little in recent months, returns with a spy novelette that ranks with the best I've ever read in that fascinating department of fiction. If you would follow an American officer through the tense events which succeed his descent at night by parachute, dressed in a German uniform, miles behind the enemy lines, don't miss this remarkable story. Ared White probably knows more about the inner workings of the armies than any war story writer of the day, and his tales chronicle events that were momentous in the days before victory . . . There are so many stories worth talking about in these coming issues that I fear it will be necessary to exercise restraint. In fact, I shall begin right now, and with a certain excusable pride leave you to the enjoyment of what is, not strangely, my favorite magazine — and which will, if my efforts are rewarded, be yours as well.

William Corcoran

THE NEWS OF NEXT MONTH

LOST EMPIRE

By Robert Carse

A tale as real as Robinson Crusoe, of jungle fugitives from the ruthless justice of the penal colony at French Guiana, the land of living dead—a story of the gamble with death of grim men who have nothing to lose and, beyond the trackless tropic forest, a lifetime of freedom to gain.

THE RANCH ON RED RIVER

By Allan Vaughan Elston

The thrilling story of a New Mexican ranch, where a sinister plot unfolds—and where something new in Western fiction is revealed.

ACROSS THE LINES

By Ared White

Did you thrill to the adventures behind the German lines of *Secret Operative K-13?* Here is another story of an American who penetrated to the heart of the German army, by the author of some of the finest stories ever written about the late war.

* * *

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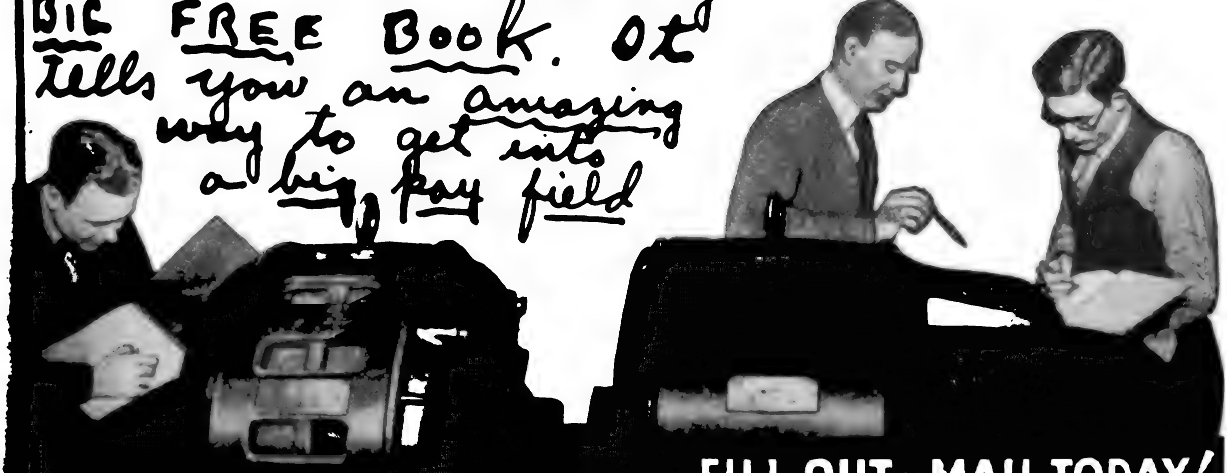

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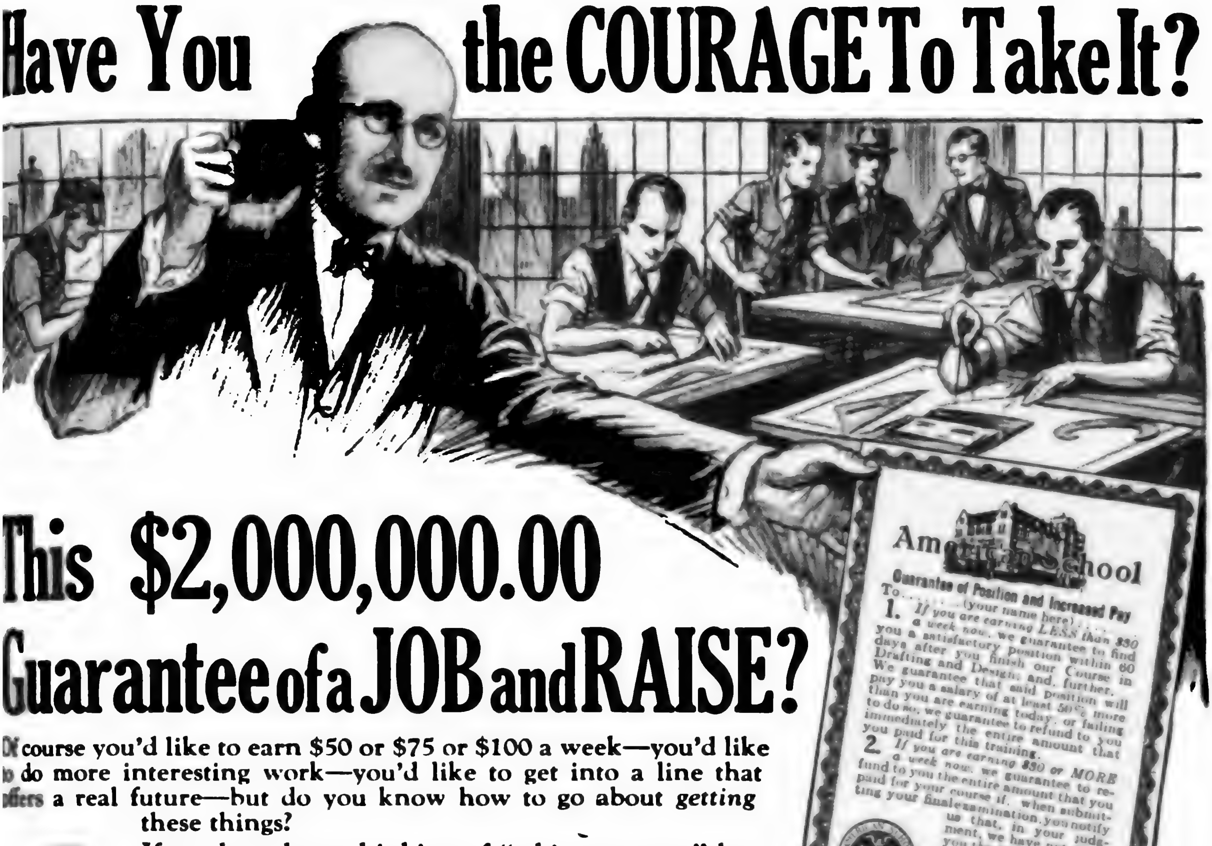
Volume L
Number

Have You the COURAGE To Take It?



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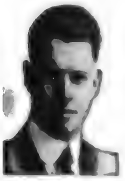

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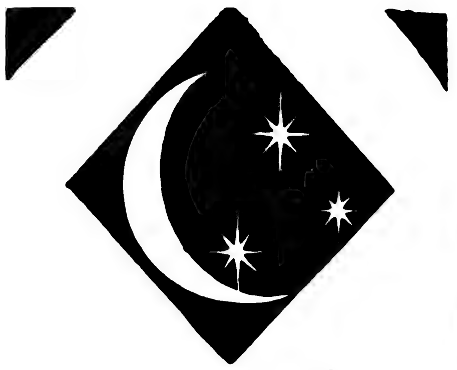

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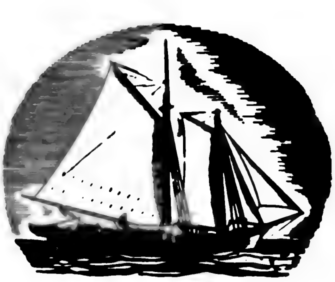

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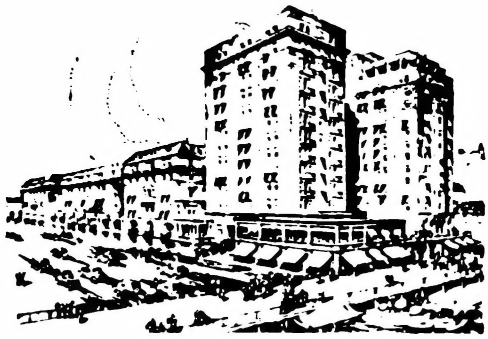

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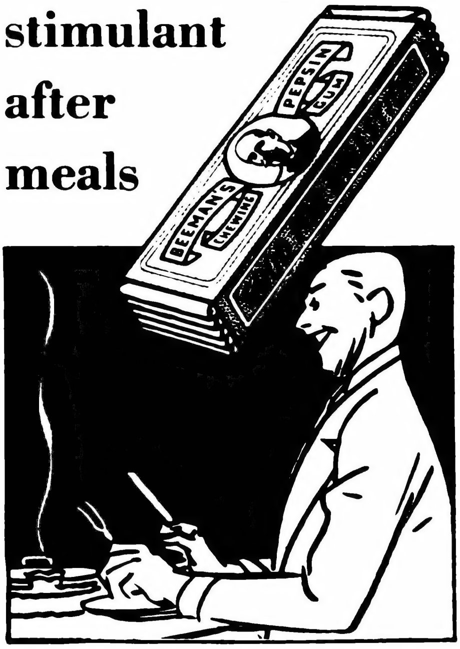

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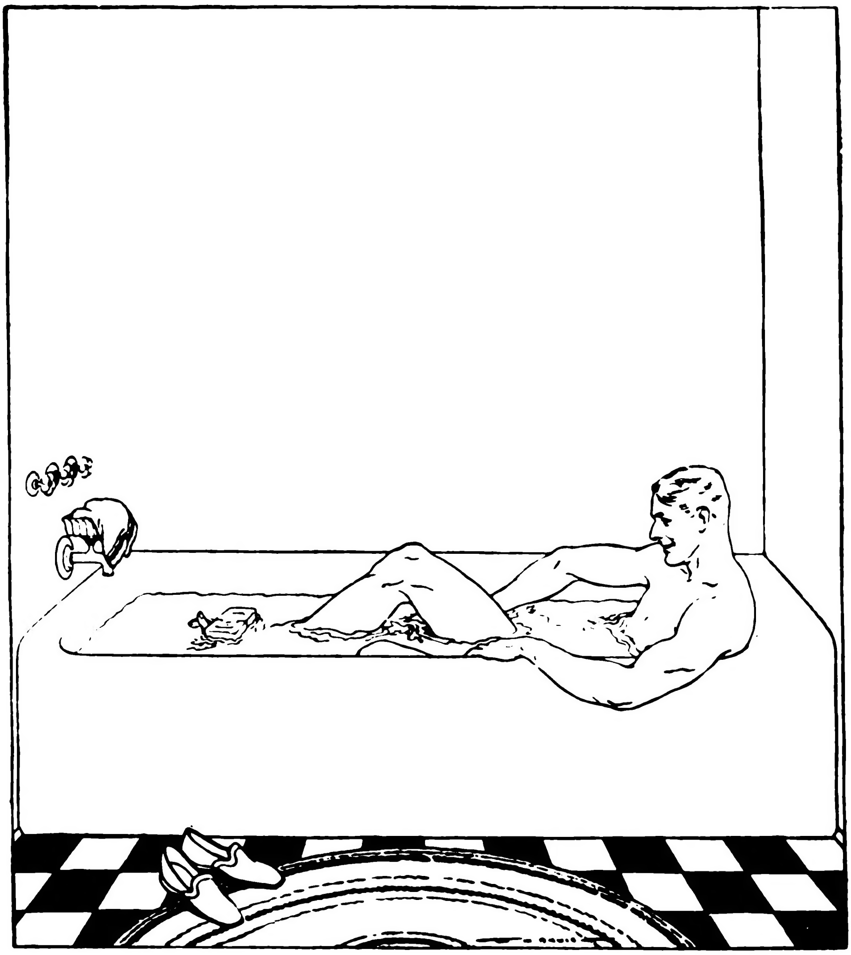

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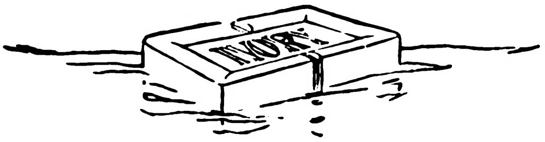

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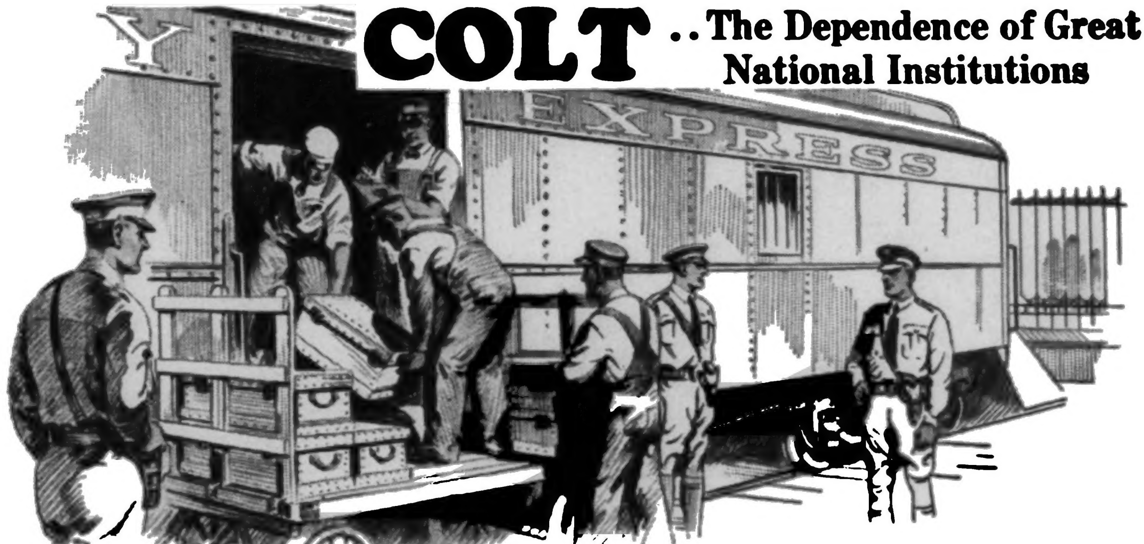

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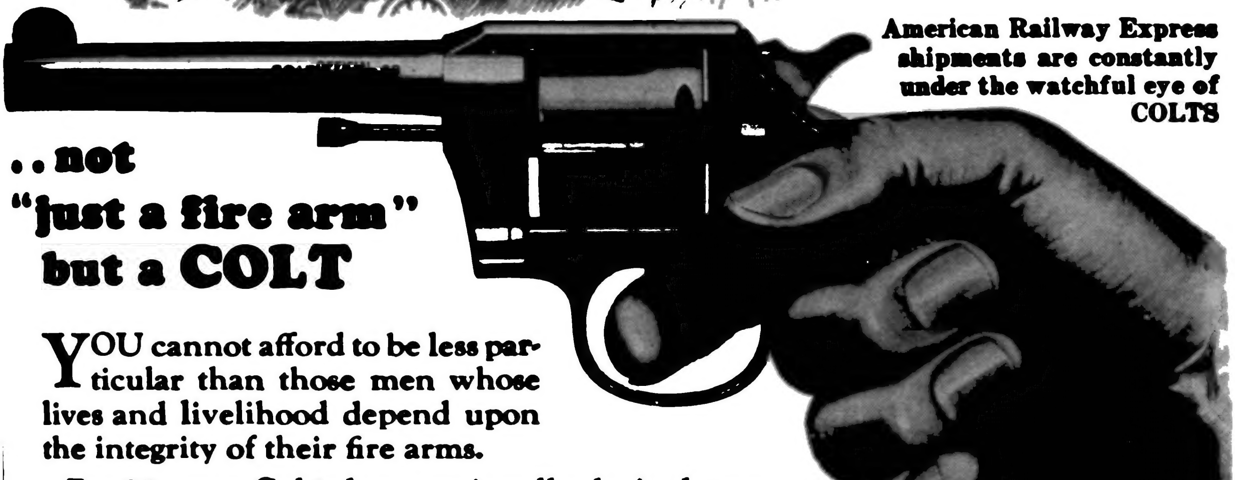

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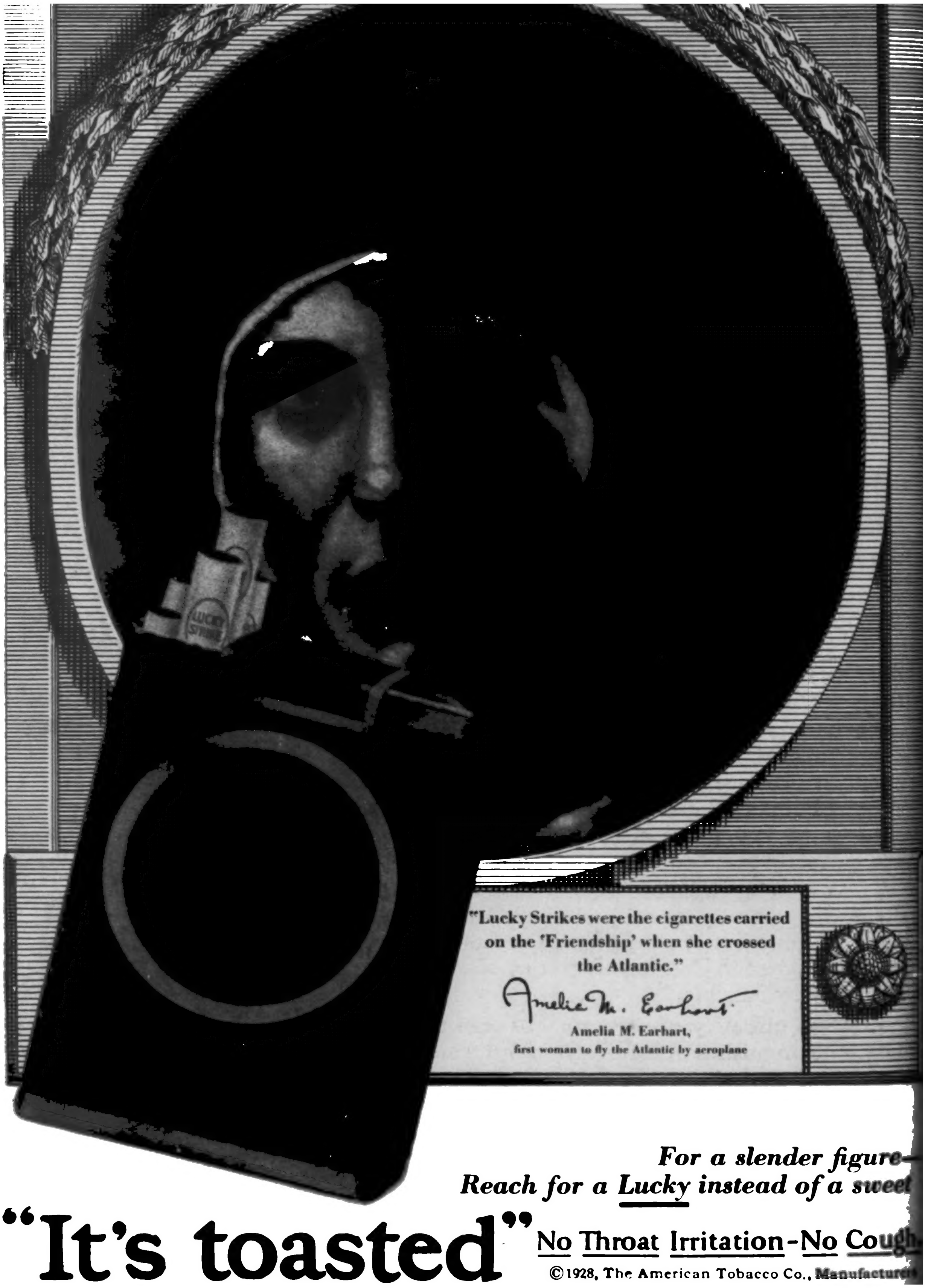

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